#75 The Magazine of Adventure Gaming $3.00

Space Gamer

STARSHIPS IN *CHAMPIONS*

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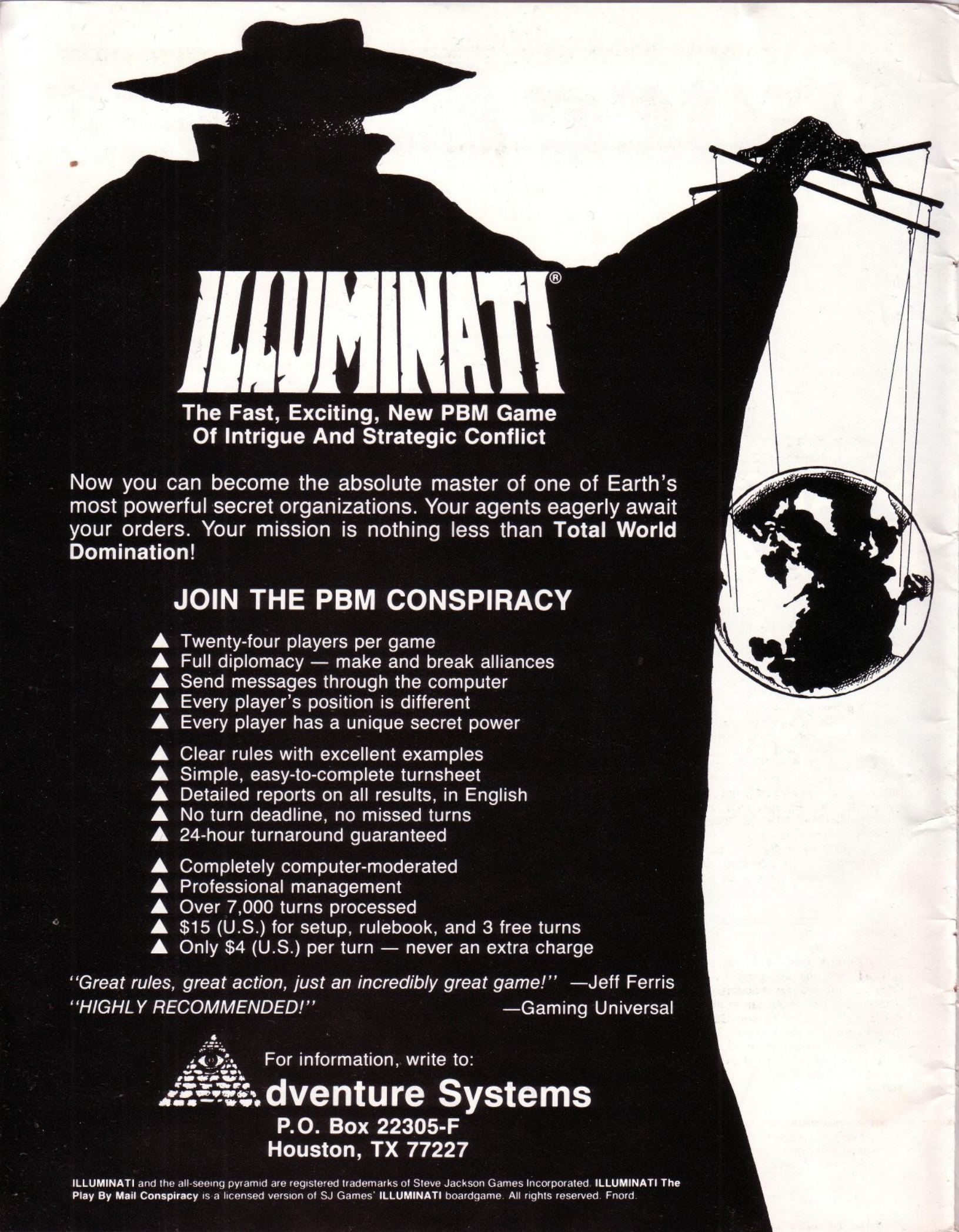
Frank Chadwick
Greg Costikyan
Steve Jackson
Rick Loomis
George Mac Donald



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GAMES: ***Hammer's Slammers, Dragonriders of Pern, The Lonely Mountain, Wizards' Realm, Witchlord.*** **SUPPLEMENTS:** ***The Secret Wars, Signal GK, Rangers of the North, Trail of Tsathogghua, Throne of Evil, Moria, The Romulans, Margin of Profit, Demand of Honor, The Iron Wind*** (point/counterpoint), ***Monsters of Myth and Legend, Ghost of Lion Castle.*** **PLAY AIDS:** ***Marvel Super Heroes*** *Adventure Fold-Up Figures.* **PUBLICATIONS:** *The First and Second Citadel Compendia.* **MINIATURES:** *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Celestial Dragon, Gnolls, Folklore Creatures of the Night, Dragon Lords Ninja & Samurai Adventurers.*

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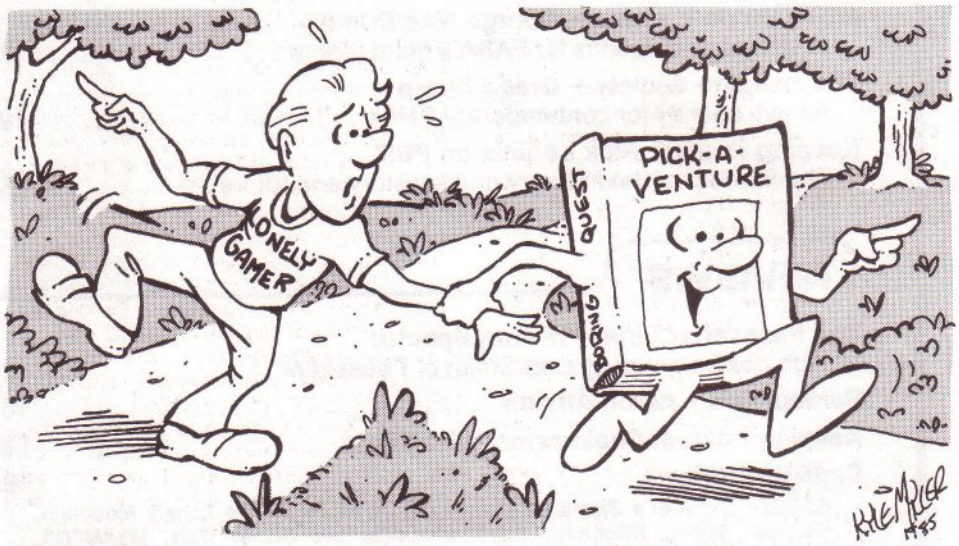
Solo Games: A Modest Proposal

I was playing West End's ***Star Trek — The Adventure Game*** when an odd thought struck me. I realized that here was a two-player game where both players are, in reality, playing a solitaire game. Oh sure, there are some small bits of interaction. If two players are at the same planet they can "bid" to explore it. And the Klingon player can use agents to sabotage Federation ships. But beyond that, players in this intergalactic game are in their own little worlds.

Solitaire appears to be hot, ***Star Trek*** being the latest major effort to pay more than lip service to the solo player. There was a time when all a solo player could do was adapt a multi-player game. ***Star Trek***, on the other hand, is really a solo game adapted for two players.



Don Greenwood, editor of *The General*, has made his view quite clear that solo play is simply inferior to face-to-face gaming. Considering the number of *The General*'s readers who play solo, that's an unfortunate attitude. The Avalon Hill Game Company's lone solo, ***B-17***, is a bland festival of dice-throwing. Remarkable, but hardly a game I'd play twice . . . why bother, since it virtually plays itself? AH's ***Hitler's War***, on the other hand, makes a terrific solo. And as one who's suffered through many face-to-face games filled with tedious waiting that results in a less-than-exciting move, I'll take a fast-paced solo any day.

It seems that everywhere you turn, solitaire gaming is being given some kind of attention. Most new roleplaying systems (***Paranoia, James Bond 007, Justice Inc.***) come with a sample solo adventure designed to teach the basics of the game system. Most new board-games (***Sanctuary, Starship Duels I*** and ***II, The Lonely Mountain, Dragonriders of Pern***) come with special solitaire rules. Solo adventures for fantasy roleplaying systems continue to arrive, with TSR releasing its "magic viewer" series to replace the "invisible ink" modules. Blade continues to release solos for ***Tunnels & Trolls*** regularly. And, of course, there's that solitaire champ, ***Ambush,*** with its recent additions ***Move Out!*** and ***Purple Heart.***

And yet I'd like to propose that the designers and companies are missing the mark with these efforts. I suggest that three misconceptions are preventing the best solo game design.

Misconception #1: *A solitaire game must do the thinking for the player's "opponent" (and sometimes even for the player himself).* While admittedly a major design accomplishment, ***Ambush*** is the worst example of this. A good deal of ***Ambush***'s muscle is devoted to the mundane movements of opposing forces. Using Victory Games' special viewer to move enemy soldiers box-by-box becomes, ultimately, incredibly tedious. But more importantly, the enemy's move is not that thrilling to begin with. Decision-making, even when moving opposing units against your own forces, shouldn't be out of the question. A staggering accomplishment, ***Ambush*** lost my interest because it did *too much* for me, while I was left with a lot of viewer-juggling.

Misconception #2: *Solitaire play must be simple and automatic.* The solo variants for ***Sanctuary*** and ***Dragonriders of Pern*** are good examples of this problem. In each case the solitaire play is so mechanical that there's little point in playing. ***Sanctuary,*** a terrific board-game, becomes a total zero in its solitaire guise. More thought, and more challenging rules, could have provided a solitaire variant worth playing.

Misconception #3: *True freedom of choice cannot exist in a solo roleplaying adventure.* This is perhaps the most prevalent problem, and the one I find most irritating. Look at nearly any solo adventure from TSR or Blade, as well as the mini-solos in ***Paranoia, Bond,*** and ***Justice Inc.***, and you see the same tired format, a format currently used by a horde of juvenile *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. Players begin at a certain point and then follow various branches to arrive at the end. And it's surprising how little difference a player's choice can make. There's little chance to decide where to go, to return to different places, or to play any kind of strategy. You're on a train line where you get to throw the switches. While it might be okay for spawning salmon, people deserve better.

West End Games' well-written ***Star Trek*** suffers, to some degree, from all of these. The world you explore is randomly drawn, and subsequent events are determined by a random die roll. While you do decide what actions to take, the results depend on what officers just happen to be aboard your ship. Derivative of the solo system found in FGU's ***Star Explorer, Star Trek*** is enjoyable largely due to the intriguing writing of designer Greg Costikyan. The game itself lacks meat.

"So, Big Shot" (a voice from the crowd shouts out), "what do *you* propose to do?" Glad you asked.

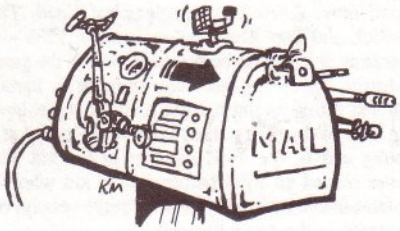
I think it's time for a couple of things to happen. First, solo adventures have to stop leading players by the hand. More design effort, more thought, and more challenging systems are needed to provide a solo worth playing. The adventures should be designed so that players can decide where to go (you know, just like in real life), moving freely and not just flowing down an irreversible stream. That, as we now know, is for the kiddie-adventure books.

Solo variants and games should allow players to play against themselves, while altering any double-blind rules. Solo games can have built-in surprises, but it's not necessary (or desirable) for every move of an opposing force to be pre-planned.

Lastly, the same design effort that goes into a game's basic rules should go into the solo version. Nobody needs a throwaway solo. And nearly every challenging two-player game has the potential for tense solo play.

Solitaire games, adventures, and variants are here to stay. I say it's time they grew up. What do you think?

Contributing Editor Matt Costello attempts to practice what he preaches. The first solo for ***Call of Cthulhu****, "The Thing in the Darkness," appeared in* ***Fantasy Gamer 3****.* ***RoleAids*** *recently released his fantasy solo,* ***Final Challenge****, and this summer Chaosium will release his book-length solo,* ***Alone Against Cthulhu****. He is currently putting the finishing touches to a solo adventure featuring Batman for Mayfair's* ***DC Heroes****.* □



Letters

Address correspondence to *Space Gamer*, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. We prefer letters that are typed and double-spaced. And please give your name and address, okay?

A Belated Correction

I'm writing in reference to an article in [*Space Gamer*] issue #71, "Mines in ***Star Fleet Battles.***" Mr. Mizia includes two glaring rules errors. The first involves the use of transporters when faced with a Hellbore or an Enveloping Plasma Torpedo. Walt suggests using general shield reinforcement to "mitigate internal damage." Such general reinforcement would also block use of the transporters [rule (G8.23)].

The second involves the use of mines as an antidrone barrier. The author states that the ships execute a high-energy turn at the barrier line and lay mines in plotted hexes without dropping shields, implying laying mines from shuttles bays. He then refers us to figure 3, which shows mines in hexes adjacent to the actual hexes of ship travel. Mines laid from shuttle bays must be dropped in hexes which the ship has passed through [rule (M3.21)].

I would hope, before writing future [***SFB***] articles, Walt Mizia would more thoroughly research the subject.

Stephen W. Newberg
So. Windsor, CT

Thanks for the corrections. We make reasonable efforts to verify the accuracy of our articles; in the case of Walt Mizia's piece on mines, our efforts were much more than reasonable, but a couple of glitches got through anyway. Our apologies; but we hope you, in turn, will appreciate that researching voluminous and intricate ***Star Fleet Battles*** *rules requires an almost Talmudic level of exertion. Anybody out there feel up to the task of codifying and explaining the various versions of the* ***SFB*** *rules? We'd like to hear from you.*

—The Editors

Letter from the *Other* Editor

To the Editor:

I agree with most of Aaron Allston's criticisms of the "new" *SG* (issue 73), but I have a few additional comments to offer.

Adventures. Yes, these do take a lot of effort. Anything worth doing takes a lot of effort. But I remember "Adventures on Tschai" (issue 40) and "(your name) and the Holy Grail" (issue 41) as two of the finest pieces of work I have ever helped to produce. And this sort of effort makes the magazine more interesting.

Fiction. Where did it go? Like adventures, good fiction takes a lot of effort, but it's worth it. Look at "Sam Beowulf" (issue 31) or "End Game (issue 33) if you don't believe me.

Play By Mail. I have doubts about your decision to cut back on PBM coverage. The new magazines have not yet proven themselves (and one is already dead). Meanwhile, a large part of your advertising still comes from PBM companies. Perhaps you should reconsider.

The Future of the Magazine. Warren Spector seems to think *SG* isn't worthwhile because it isn't profitable. That's what Howard Thompson thought when he sold the magazine in 1980. I remember. But Thompson was wrong, and he soon had to start a new magazine. Publishing a magazine is important for a lot of reasons that don't show up on a balance sheet: free advertising, publicity, feedback, good will, customer loyalty. The loss of *SG* turned out to be a severe blow to Metagaming, and I am sure the same would be true for Steve Jackson Games.

Anyway, Spector is mistaken when he says Steve Jackson began as "a game publisher who happens to publish magazines on the side." Steve Jackson was originally a magazine publisher, and later added games to his line. His company's first game (***Kung Fu 2100***) was published in issue 30 of *The Space Gamer.* This may be one reason Steve has persisted in published *SG* so long and for so little reward.

Forrest Johnson
Santa Barbara, CA

Forrest — editor of ***Space Gamer*** *from issue 28 through 51 — raises several points deserving of reply. Running down his list:*

Adventures. *Yes, they make the magazine more interesting — especially for the people* ***producing*** *the magazine. The fact is, they don't affect sales a whit. If a game or adventure is good enough to publish at all, it's good enough to publish where the most people will see it. That isn't (sorry to say) in* ***Space Gamer.*** *Why reach a magazine audience of no more than 12,000 when you can reach several thousand more with a separate release? Also, as I'm sure you recall, games take* ***a lot*** *of time, which makes magazines late, which makes readers angry . . . you get my point.*

Fiction. *I'm afraid our recent reader survey showed that fiction wasn't "worth it." I love a good story as much as anyone, but not necessarily in a game magazine.*

Play By Mail. *Believe me, we all have doubts about that decision. It wasn't an easy one to make. So far, there's been no cry of outrage from the readers, so we'll wait and see. And, again, we never said we were dropping PBM coverage completely — just the PBM Updates. We still run reviews and think pieces on a regular basis.*

The Future of the Magazine. *I have never and will never say that* ***Space Gamer*** *isn't worthwhile because it isn't profitable. I've been reading* ***SG*** *for years, and I'm proud as can be to have my name on the masthead. I recognize the intangible benefits a magazine offers, but those intangibles sometimes pale before the realities of cash flow and scheduling problems. Tangible problems often (usually) require tangible solutions.*

. . . ***game publishers who happen to publish magazines on the side.*** *I had no intention of addressing the origins of Steve Jackson Games. I meant only to talk about SJ Games as it positions itself to compete in the marketplace* ***as it exists today.*** *In 1980, Steve Jackson may well have been a magazine publisher first and foremost; today, as we are wont to say around the office,* ***Car Wars*** *pays the bills, not* ***Space Gamer.***

—WS

Query Letter

Dear Mr. Varney:

In my last letter I mentioned wanting to write an article about two poor sellers, each of which offered something unique to fantasy gaming. You asked what games they were. The first is ***Duel Arcane*** by Gamelords, and the second is ***High Fantasy,*** last by Reston Publishing.

Duel Arcane is a fascinating game of combat between shapeshifters. Its strengths are that each animal form has unique advantages and disadvantages; attributes can vary within a species; initiative rolls determine not only who acts first, but also how many actions he gets — and although the faster animal averages more actions, a lucky roll for a slower animal could change this. The system thrives on lucky rolls — everything is on six-sided dice, but rolls of six are added on and rolled again, ad infinitum; however, averages still weigh with the guy rolling the most dice. Its main weaknesses are that using attribute bonus points to improve a character takes a lot of paperwork, and some of the animals have special abilities which are a bit fanciful. However, we liked it so much that I designed weapon and armor tables to go with it, and began a spell and talent list, and we ran fantasy roleplaying adventures with the system for quite a while. I sent my work to Gamelords, and they said they liked it, but that (to my surprise) the game had not sold well and they let it go out of print. They told me that if I decided to write an article and present my tables as an expansion they wouldn't mind. At the moment I am waiting for specific guidelines as to how much of the original they will let me reproduce.

I bought ***High Fantasy*** because I'm a roleplaying game addict, and it was on sale. Also, as a GM, I hate fretting over experience points (which is why ***RuneQuest*** is so appealing) and this has only five EP per level! The other two main selling points for ***High Fantasy*** are that encumbrance directly affects quickness, based on an individualized chart on each character sheet (again appealing to me as a GM); and everything is based on percentile dice (my apologies, I know you like six-siders), with damage being taken as loss of attack and defense percentages. This means that as you beat on someone he gets steadily weaker in combat ability without having to figure such things as how the hit points he's lost affect his dexterity (as in ***TFT***) or ignoring effects of damage on combat ability (as in ***AD&D***). Also, the magic system is weird but fun.

High Fantasy's weak points are that experience is by levels (I hate levels), character classes define what skills a character has (I loathe character classes!), and the artwork on my copy, particularly the cover art, is so bad that I'm ashamed to be seen running off copies of the character sheet for play. Reston Publishing may have corrected this when they bought the rights to the game.

I am running my present, fairly longstanding campaign in ***High Fantasy,*** with supplements such as ***The Compleat Alchemist*** and ***The Compleat Spell Caster***. My players have played in several systems under many referees before, and we are having more fun now than ever.

I would like to simply cover the main points of ***High Fantasy*** in my article, as an example of a system which focuses on often-overlooked or underdeveloped areas and handles them in a unique way.

As usual, I thank you for your time and attention. My best wishes to you all at *Space Gamer*. I really appreciate your magazine, and as always, it is a pleasure doing business with you.

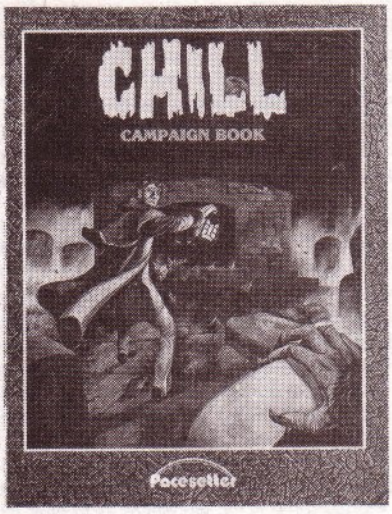
Your servant,
Lester W. Smith
Normal, IL

Dear Mr. Smith,

The article proposal is interesting, but we're uneasy about devoting much space to two obscure games. There must be some better way of getting across the points you make; how about a letter in the lettercol?

Regards,
Allen Varney
Assistant Editor

The Pacesetter Line



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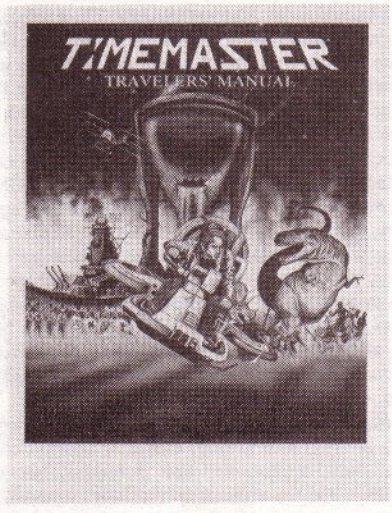

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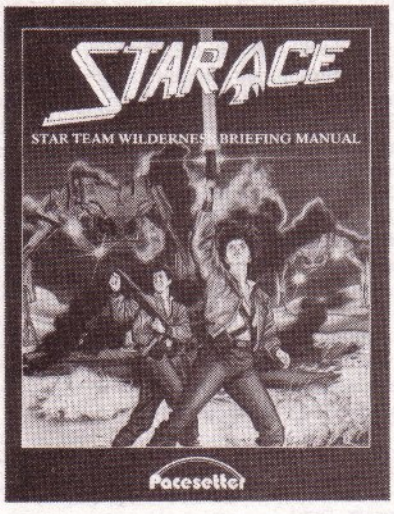

or Winning the Race?

Featured Review by Warren Spector

Eighteen months ago, Pacesetter Ltd. didn't exist; now, following the release of ***Chill, Timemaster,*** and ***Star Ace*** — all released in 1984 — the company is a force to be reckoned with in the gaming industry. Pacesetter has made its mark by identifying and filling an unoccupied niche in the roleplaying ecosystem: The games seem to be aimed at the young end of the RPG market, at the kid who's never played an RPG before, at the kid who finds unfathomable the multi-volume, multi-version rules common in the game business.

Chill, Timemaster, and ***Star Ace*** are entry-level games, easy to learn and play, providing good value for money at $12 apiece, and offering relatively flashy (and ever-improving) graphics and components. For the beginning roleplayer, any one of the Pacesetter games would provide a fine introduction to the hobby. These qualities alone might be enough to explain the initial success of ***Chill, Timemaster,*** and ***Star Ace.***

Think back to your first roleplaying experience: Either you were taught to play by someone who'd already waded through a set of rules written in "Gamer" (a language as familiar to most people as Swahili) or you tried plowing through ***D&D*** or ***Traveller*** or ***Empire of the Petal Throne*** yourself and ended up thoroughly confused by things like strike ranks, character classes, alignments, and polyhedral dice. And let's not forget all those wonderful formulas for figuring out whether you managed to blow your nose successfully. Bad news.

Well, the friendly folk at Pacesetter spent the last year creating three interlocking sets of rules, all written in standard American English even your mother could understand if she didn't think roleplaying games were silly and maybe a little dangerous. Like your old graded readers, each of the games builds logically from the one(s) before: Once you've learned the ***Chill*** system, you know the rudiments of ***Timemaster***; once you've learned that, you pretty much know how to play ***Star Ace.***

But wait, there's more. Not only can you learn to play these games in little more time than it takes to read this review, but you can use the Pacesetter system to adventure in all sorts of game-worlds. The basic Pacesetter system is flexible — or, as it is said, "generic" — enough to cover nearly all the thematic ground most players require. You can joyride through outer space one week, battle vampires the next, and fight alongside Odysseus the next — and you only have to learn one set of rules.

Is there enough complexity, enough detail, enough variety here to keep experienced roleplayers happy? We'll see.

Chill

In some respects, ***Chill*** is more flexible than ***Call of Cthulhu*** (the clear leader in the horror RPG field) in that it isn't tied to a particular era or literary tradition. (The fans of H.P. Lovecraft get nastier than Nyarlathotep if you mess with the Master's mythos!) The enemies which must be defeated by the player characters are old standbys, the kind several generations of kids have enjoyed in movies, books, and comics — ghosts, ghouls, vampires, werewolves, the Loch Ness monster . . . If you've had a nightmare about it, chances are it exists in the ***Chill*** universe.

The players portray members of S.A.V.E. — *Societas Albae Viae Eternitata* (or Eternal Society of the White Way), an organization devoted to the study and destruction of supernatural forces. This gives players an excuse for adventuring, and a source of information, cash, and supplies but, perhaps of greater importance, the rules and regulations of the organization give players direction as they battle the forces of evil. This is a great boon to beginning roleplayers — perhaps as great a boon as the game's simple rules.

Opening the *Chill* box, players find two books — the 64-page "Campaign Book," with nearly all the information a player or "Chillmaster" (CM) will need in order to play, and the 32-page "Horrors From the Unknown" book, with data on the various bad guys CMs can throw at player characters. The Pacesetter games are all marked by a strong, personal style. You won't find better, more consistently entertaining writing in any set of game rules.

The artwork, by Jim Holloway, is almost supernaturally uneven — sometimes terrific, sometimes, well, not so terrific. The layout of the books, especially the handling of charts and tables, is awkward at best, making it difficult to find the charts you need in the heat of play.

Both books look as if they had been hurriedly produced. Just a bit more time and care would have gone a long way toward making *Chill* a better-looking and better-playing game. Little things like tables which are undifferentiated from text and a too-skimpy index which lists "Armed Combat" without giving a page number are problems which should have been caught before *Chill* went to the printer.

Also in the *Chill* box are 140 cardboard counters with adequate (but no better) illustrations of player characters, creatures, and various types of household furnishings. The standard Pacesetter two-sided map is also included. One side offers a world map (in color) pointing out areas of supernatural activity. This side — reminiscent of the map provided with *Call of Cthulhu* — is of limited utility. The other side depicts the three floors of Warwick House, site of the introductory *Chill* adventure which comes with the game.

This adventure is worthy of comment. Many roleplaying games come packaged with adventures but, as far as I know, *Chill* is the first to include an introductory folder advising players to begin playing that adventure before they've read the rules of the game! To begin, players have only to read a

The Word from Pacesetter

Carl Smith, Pacesetter Ltd.

The slogan *Pacesetter . . . We Move!* sums up our company philosophy. At one time, we all worked for TSR, Inc. We left to form our own company because we saw a chance to design innovative games and cover new ground in the adventure gaming industry. As of January 23, 1985, Pacesetter was one year old.

In May 1984, *Chill* was published. We thought the hard part was over, but life was just beginning to grow complicated. After completing *Chill*, we had to support it. By the end of 1984 we had *Timemaster* and *Star Ace* to support also. Too many good games have damaged themselves with inadequate support products. To avoid this, we provided a steady stream of adventures and accessories after each game's introduction.

Our games are aimed at a wide audience. Many roleplaying games either consciously or unconsciously parallel the demographics of *D&D*. In addition to expanding our demographics, we wanted to include greater use of investigation and interaction in roleplaying, positive ethnic role models, and emphasize plot-oriented adventures. We chose game themes which were fun and which filled market positions that were largely empty or at worst, inadequately filled.

Pacesetter games emphasize using wits and not just brawn. In fact, player characters who act rashly without thinking often run afoul of the law. Too many games ignore skills and devices which prove useful in a gamer's hands such as impersonation, modelling, acting, and forgery. Often games dwell on skills which are strictly male and combat-oriented.

Pacesetter game themes try to be universal with their emphasis on adventure, Gothic horror, romance, and historical fiction. We want to offer something for everyone. Our game designs address the following points.

1. Complexity is not better, just longer.
2. All games have an element of fantasy, either whimsical, pseudo-scientific, or heroic fantasy. Each game aims at a particular variety of fantasy.
3. Game themes and adventures should emphasize characterization and plot.
4. Each adventure should provide a mystery. Emphasize problem solving and investigative skills so they are just as important as combat skills.
5. Each game must be user-friendly with quality components, attractive artwork, and perceived value for the money a gamer pays for it.

The greatest asset of any Pacesetter game is its integrated system. One reviewer characterized this system as "simple elegance." Two facets of this elegance are character generation and the action table. A player character can move from one game system to another without difficulty or a lengthy revision of stats. The action table facilitates combat, ability, and skill checks. Using this table gives the CM not only a result of the action, but gradates it if desired. Referees can run a complex combat quickly and efficiently, and still maintain the flavor of a vastly more chart-oriented, complex system without all the page-flipping required by some games. Elegant mechanics allow Pacesetter to focus on character and story, such as in the *Vengeance of Dracula* adventure. Having the action table as a bridge between systems gives gamers a pleasant sense of familiarity when going from one Pacesetter game to another.

Another strong feature of Pacesetter games is "voice." Rules and explanations of a game's mechanics or milieu are usually told through a character associated with the game. The sarcastic and ominous Raven who narrates *Chill* is an example of voice. In *Timemaster*, each historical section of the "Guide to the Continuum" is narrated by a character from that historical era. No one really likes having to read and study the rules before he can enjoy his game, and the use of voice allows us to make the game rules fun to read.

Some Pacesetter systems appear too clean to the casual observer. A game should have simple and elegant mechanics. After all, more complex is not necessarily better. Some gamers equate massive charts and tables with a detailed game system. We achieve detail through multiple use of some charts and tables. It is more difficult to design an economical game system which allows the referee to handle many situations with one set of mechanics than it is to design a score of different tables which handle as many different actions. Games with too many tables often reflect that the designer did not work on the problem long enough to boil it down.

Although Pacesetter game systems bear a resemblance to each other, each game appeals to a different audience. Gamers may own all Pacesetter's games, and enjoy each for a different reason.

The *Chill* game has wide appeal. Almost everyone has an idea of what a horror movie is, and *Chill* appeals to universal experiences. Everyone fears something. In short, young and old, male and female, hardcore and casual gamer can relate to this game.

To facilitate access to *Chill*, we devised the "Read Me First" folder which allows a player to read four pages, look over eight pre-generated characters, and then play a sixteen-page introductory adventure before having to read either the "Campaign Book" or "Horrors from the Unknown" book. To date, everyone seems to like the concept of "Read Me First," and several other companies have emulated it.

Chill is a game of horror and the supernatural. In *Chill* we wanted to do more than frighten player characters — we wanted to frighten players!

We analyzed the elements of horror and tried to generalize what situations frightened people. These elements are:

1. Isolation of an individual from society and civilization.
2. Placing an individual in a strange environment or changing his normal environment.
3. Confronting a player with mysterious and unknown occurrences — we can deal with things we know and expect, but the unexpected unnerves us.
4. Reversal of events — perhaps you hunt a strange creature, following its tracks, and then on your way home notice a second set of the creature's footprints which seem to be following yours!
5. Confront horror indirectly at first, and let the creatures (who are very powerful) play with the characters rather than confront them directly from the beginning.

To frighten players, we capitalize on the feeling of uncertainty, which includes portions of all five elements of horror. *Chill* has no generic creatures . . . at least no generic creatures as far as abilities, hit points, and so on. Some of the creatures used are very familiar, but each is individual, as different from other creatures as one human being is from another. Using that difference, we hypothesized that although there might be hundreds of ghosts, every one of them would have its own motivations, special abilities, and variations from the norm. Each would have its own unique reason for existing as a creature from the unknown, and in essence, each creature becomes the nucleus of an entire adventure which would explain its raison d'etre.

Keeping uncertainty as a key element of horror in mind, gamers are presented one kind of vampire in the basic game and two other kinds in the *Things* book. The *Vampires* 96-page book adds several other vampires as well as legends and lore about the rulers of night and darkness. Killing a vampire will never again be as simple as going into the north forty and whittling down a sapling for a night's diversion.

(continued on p. 7)

four-page, READ-ME-FIRST! introduction to the rules, pick up the 16-page adventure booklet, and begin playing! And, sure enough, the cockamamie scheme works! The adventure itself is too straightforward and contrived (with CM instructions like "Don't let the players go upstairs yet!" How do you stop them?). But what the heck? At least you don't have to wait for days while everyone learns the rules.

Oh yes, ***Chill*** also comes with three of the very best ten-sided dice you'll ever see. If you're into dice, you'll love these little beauties. The clack they make when you roll them around in your hand is almost sinful.

Though superficially simpler than ***Call of Cthulhu***, the clear leader in the horror field, ***Chill*** falls somewhat short of the mark. For a more detailed look at the areas in which ***Chill*** needs work, see the game system discussion below.

Timemaster

In this game of time travel, player characters belong to a 72nd-century organization called the Time Corps, whose function is to protect the worlds in "The Continuum." The Continuum, defined in the rules as "every place at all times," consists of "Parallels." Each Parallel consists of "one universe and its history"; some universes are nearly identical to our own, while others are completely different. Since the Time Corps has the ability to travel to any Parallel at will, the range of adventures available to the Continuum Master (CM) and the players is virtually unlimited.

The Continuum needs protection because an evil alien race, the Demoreans, is bent on changing the course(s) of history in order to take control of the entire Continuum. The Demoreans are a particularly insidious enemy because of their ability to change shape — they often take on the guise of humans to confound their enemies. (A little paranoia goes a long way in roleplaying games!) In addition to the alien threat, the players have to contend with renegade time travellers who care little about the effect they may have on history. Again, as in ***Chill***, the players are given a reason to adventure beyond the mere acquisition of wealth — they have a cause, and an organization which provides materials and guidance and limits.

Each mission the players undertake has a "significance rating," determined by the level of historical impact of the person or event with which the players interact. Specific NPCs and events within the framework of the adventure also have significance ratings. As the adventure unfolds, the CM keeps careful track of the "mistakes" the players make: Did they leave a 72nd-century gun with an NPC? Did they kill an NPC destined to become president in 2035? And so on. At the end of the adventure, the CM subtracts the total significance rating of the players' mistakes from the adventure significance rating to yield the number of success (experience) points players divide among themselves. The mistake total also tells players whether or not their actions changed history (or prevented historical change). The Time Corps frowns upon changing history.

The overall look of the "Timemaster Travelers' Manual" (the basic rulebook) is a step up from ***Chill*** — clip art never looked so good — but still sub-optimum. Again, the major problem is haphazard presentation of charts. Players must consult these charts constantly during play (or fudge a lot of stuff). As things stand now, chart-checking is too time-consuming.

In fact, it's more than a little difficult to play *any* of the Pacesetter games without a ref screen. But never fear, Pacesetter will happily sell you a ref screen, complete with adventure for a mere $6. Though the price is a bit high, buy one if you plan to play one of these games.

In addition to the basic rulebook, ***Timemaster*** purchasers get a nifty item entitled "Guide to the Continuum." This book will interest all gamemasters with a hankering to go time-travelling — regardless of the game system they use. Basically, it's a Cliff's Notes view of several periods in Earth history (plus discussions of the dread Demoreans to keep good agents on their toes).

Also in the ***Timemaster*** box is ***Red Ace High***, a World War I adventure. Though not without problems, this adventure is a model of organization. Beginning gamemasters will find few better introductory RPG adventures. Like ***Chill***'s ***Terror of Warwick House***, however, it's a bit sketchy in spots. This is especially true in transitions — or lack of them — between encounters. And there are some niggling problems: There's all sorts of advice about what to do if player characters dress up as German soldiers but no mention at all of what to do if they *don't* grab German uniforms! Still and all, a solid first adventure.

Rounding out the ***Timemaster*** component list are a two-sided map, three dice, and a bunch of counters. The counters include a couple of player characters and some Demoreans, but for the most part, they're boardgame counters — complete with movement factors and attack strengths. These (and the hex grid map) are used in mass combat situations, a new wrinkle in the Pacesetter system.

Other game features introduced in ***Timemaster*** are air combat and armor rules. More about these novel, though troublesome, features in the discussion of combat, below.

HIGHLAND TERROR (Pacesetter); $6. Designed by Garry Spiegle. 8½" x 11" 34-page book. For Chillmaster and up to eight players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Highland Terror, Pacesetter's second adventure for its ***Chill*** supernatural horror RPG, takes player-characters to the highlands of Scotland and a confrontation with the legendary Loch Ness Monster and several Celtic gods incarnate — actually creatures of the Unknown. A revived Druidic cult plans to help bring these beings, in particular the one passing itself off as the Celtic god Lug, into our world at Loch Ness. The players, as S.A.V.E. envoys, must face a journey on a doomed ship, a murder charge, and several deadly monsters to stop it. The scenario is divided into six sections, from introductory material for Chillmaster and players to the final confrontation in the Drunemeton of Lug, beneath the banks of Loch Ness. It is formatted in standard Pacesetter style, with paragraphs to read for the players alternating with CM materials in each section. Along with the adventure itself, the scenario includes three new entangling weapon skills for the game — bolo, lasso, and whip — along with new Evil Way Disciplines, animals, and corporeal creatures (though many of these also appear in the ***Things*** supplement).

Highland Terror is a nicely crafted adventure, especially for those fascinated with the gaming possibilities of a confrontation with Nessie itself. It does a pretty fair job of mixing Celtic mythology with the ***Chill*** mythos (though some things, apparently, are not meant for man to know) and integrating the lot into a challenging adventure. The scenario itself could easily work for ***Call of Cthulhu*** or ***Stalking the Night Fantastic*** with minor alterations beyond the system conversions. And several of the plans — particularly those of the ship ***Susan Gael*** — could be used again for other adventures of the CM's own devising.

Most problems in ***Highland Terror*** are minor omissions or arise from the game itself. Identifying numbers are left off a couple of the plans, though these are easily figured out. And the fairly rigid structure of the scenario (totally dependent on going from one section to the next in order) might give some CMs a bad time if their players are clever enough to circumvent the planned sequence of events — difficult as that may be. On a more personal note, I have a *lot* of trouble accepting the "giant otter" theory for Nessie, used to describe Lug's physical appearance in the scenario.

Overall, however, ***Highland Terror*** is a solid adventure for ***Chill*** (or other supernatural horror RPGs), and shows improvement over the game's first adventure supplement — which bodes well for both Pacesetter and ***Chill*** fans.

—William A. Barton

CLASH OF KINGS! (Pacesetter); $6. Designed by Mark Acres. Adventure module for ***Timemaster***. One 32-page booklet. For two or more players plus gamemaster; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Another in the Pacesetter series of adventures for ***Timemaster***, ***Clash of Kings!*** takes place after the Time Corps' arch-foes, the Demoreans, have succeeded in a temporal alteration, wiping out the Corps. A team of agents is hurriedly put together and equipped to be sent back to the point of alteration: 492 A.D. — England, where Uther Pendragon is warring with the Duke of Cornwall at Tintagel. From there the agents, equipped with special time-travelling equipment that allows them to travel to several different eras without having to report back to base, must guarantee the continuity of the Arthurian legend.

Probably the best ***Timemaster*** module to date, ***Clash of Kings!*** provides a detailed interweaving of Arthurian legend and the Demorean's long-range plot for the destruction of the Time Corps, taking into account the possibilities of the characters' actions. Details of Arthur's birth and reign are provided, and among other things, the characters get to combat a fire-breathing dragon, champion the King in a duel against Lancelot to prove Guinevere's innocence or guilt, and fight with the forces of Camelot against Mordred and his Saxons at Mons Badon, Arthur's final battle.

There are really no faults with this module, although some of its elements, such as Merlin's true origin, are rather predictable. While the repetition of some characters' statistics (such as Arthur's, at various stages of his life) makes sense, I don't see any reason for repeating Lancelot's stats twice over the course of two pages, especially when they are identical. And finally, as is usual in most modules of any sort where world-shattering events are taking place, if the players fail in their mission, the gamemaster will either have to write off the entire campaign or come up with some *deus ex machina*.

Overall, though, ***Clash of Kings!*** is a must buy. While its compatibility with other time-travel games (such as ***Timeship***) is low, an enterprising gamemaster might be able to adapt this module, or parts of it, to such games as ***Star Trek*** (perhaps replacing Demoreans with Klingons) or ***Lords of Creation***.

—Steve Crow

Time travel RPGs seem to be in a mini-renaissance these days. If you're into this sort of game (and I confess, I'm not), ***Timemaster*** may be a good choice. It's got a fairly interesting unifying theme; the game does an excellent job of making time travel seem plausible; and the "Guide to the Continuum" is a gem. In this most open-ended form of roleplaying, providing players direction is no simple task. ***Timemaster*** does a fine job.

Star Ace

There it is, right on the box top: "Starships! Alien Worlds! Swashbuckling Action!" Having read this, you know almost everything you need to know about ***Star Ace*** in order to decide if it's your sort of game. (Of course, I'm going to go on for several more paragraphs anyway, so bear with me.)

The game rules are, as usual, presented in two books — a "Basic Training Manual" and a "Wilderness Briefing Manual." In these books, the basic (and I do mean basic) conflict is established. The players are freedom fighters, members of Star Teams, loosely allied in Han-Solo-fashion with The Alliance. (In other words, the players are The Good Guys.) They do glorious battle with The Empire (The Bad Guys). Every once in a while, they come in contact with the inscrutable Xenophobes (the mysterious, unknowable force). Basically, if you've seen *Star Wars*, you're familiar with the world of ***Star Ace***. (Sorry, Pacesetter — hope you don't get sued, but the similarities are painfully obvious.)

Unsubtle? You bet. Unoriginal? Well, yeah, I guess so. Fun? Uh huh, and then some. As in all the Pacesetter games, motivation is clear from the outset: The players know who they're fighting, and why. There's no fishing around for characterization. It's silver platter time.

The history of the conflict is laid out clearly and succinctly — political and military background, key personalities, and planets are described in just enough detail to suggest about a million scenario ideas. Players should have no trouble getting into their roles — roleplaying hints abound. Especially valuable are descriptions of life at a Star Team base (yes, lifestyle descriptions! How neat!). The Pacesetter folks have managed to cram an amazing amount of information into a very few pages.

For the first time in a Pacesetter game, players are given the option of playing nonhumans. (I suppose you could play a Demorean or a vampire in the earlier games, but the rules never tell you just how to handle all the problems you'd encounter — and there'd be plenty.) Each alien race has one "restricted" attribute and one enhanced one. Only humans are flawless in the ***Star Ace*** universe. This is not to say that all players will want to be humans, however.

The three alien races are described in entertaining and convincing fashion. Each has special abilities and talents which, in many cases, outweigh inherent racial disadvantages. The Crystal Clones, for example, can fire laser-like beams from their fingertips! The bear-like Kleibor have rather remarkable psychic skills and great strength; the feline Traka can see in the dark and move silently. Each race is unique, but some are just more fun to play than others. (Why anyone would be anything but a Kleibor is beyond me — I mean, they're big and strong, have psychic powers, and their primary motivation is to have fun. Where do I sign up?)

Regardless of the type of character you choose to play, rest assured you'll be a force to be reckoned with in any galaxy. Characters start out good (as you'd expect in a game of swashbuckling adventure!) and get even better. It doesn't hurt that all player characters are given some high-power items (like three space-age weapons and their very own spaceships — no time payments in this system!).

The major additions to the Pacesetter system found in ***Star Ace*** are, as you might expect, starship construction and combat. Like the mass combat, armor, and airplane rules in ***Timemaster***, these are a mixed blessing. More about this in a bit. A valuable and necessary discussion of planetary characteristics is also included. Planets are given both economic and technical ratings which determine the availability and cost of various types of goods. Smugglers, pirates, and criminals (and that means most player characters, I suspect) take note.

The last chapter of the "Wilderness Briefing Manual" is called "Running Star Ace." Don't try to play the game without reading it. In fact, don't gamemaster another adventure in *any* system without reading it. There's lots of good, basic information here, including hints on pacing, plotting, playing, ignoring rules (something every referee should know how to do), having fun, and combining the three Pacesetter games. This last section is very, very short — crossover adventures are a snap.

Star Ace, like the other Pacesetter games, comes packaged with a two-sided map. One side has a hex grid and pictures the Wilderness Region. Each hex represents a Grand Strategic Sector, containing one million star systems! Also included are color illustrations of the surfaces of various important planets in the region. The other side of the map is made up of what the rules call "Tactical Sectors," each of which is 42,500 miles across. (It's a blank hex grid, for crying out loud!) Guess there really isn't much terrain in outer space, but it's still the dullest of the maps included with any of the Pacesetter games. The adventure which comes with the game — ***Deuces Wild*** — is simple and straightforward. Not much more to be said.

The world of ***Star Ace*** is less original than some other SF games, but as ripoffs go, ***Star Ace*** is one of the best. Without whole-hog stealing, the Pacesetter folks have managed to retain most of the charm (and, dare I say it, magic) of the *Star Wars* series — no mean feat. ***Star Ace*** stands as perhaps the most engaging, enjoyable, just-plain fun science fiction adventure RPG I've seen. Of course, with competition like ***Traveller*** ("Pass the calculator, I've got to see if I can make my ship payment"), ***Space Opera*** (now where was that chart . . .), and ***Star Trek*** (can't wait to see the stats on Eddie Murphy in the *Star Trek IV* edition), that probably isn't saying much.

Still, if I could buy just one Pacesetter game — and maybe even just one science fiction game — ***Star Ace*** would be the one. It's flawed, but utterly charming — a "Golly-gosh gee-whiz, Captain Terrific!" sort of game. And what the heck, you'll hear the sound of lasers roaring through the vacuum of outer space as flaming engines propel you at speeds far greater than that of light. So it ain't science. I like it; sue me. You'll have to decide for yourself.

The Pacesetter System

The game system used in ***Chill***, ***Timemaster***, and ***Star Ace*** is simple but intriguing. The rules are an uneasy mixture of old and new, first and second generation roleplaying. On the one hand, you've got randomly-generated character attributes; on the other, you've got a skill point system for custom-tailoring your random character. All three games feature a single, "universal" table (a la ***Marvel Super Heroes***, ***Indiana Jones***, and ***James Bond***). This is used to resolve virtually every player action. Sound too good to be true? It is: The table must be interpreted differently in each and every situation, so there are lots of result keys scattered throughout the rules. You might as well have a hundred tables for all the page-flipping this requires! Why bother? But more on this in a bit; let's get down to the nitty-gritty of the game mechanics:

What a Character!

Character creation is a hodgepodge of random die rolls and player choices. Pacesetter characters have eight basic abilities (or attributes): Strength, Dexterity, Agility, Personality, Perception, Willpower, Luck, and Stamina. The value of each is determined by rolling 3d10, multiplying the result by 2, and adding 20 (for a range of 26–80). You can assign the resulting numbers any way you want: For instance, if you want to be strong, assign your highest randomly-determined number to your Strength.

Next, determine which skills your character has

Pacesetter Says:

Timemaster is a different kind of roleplaying game, appealing to the gamer who likes more reality with his particular fantasy. In general, the player who enjoys historical fiction or wargames also enjoys ***Timemaster***. It is a game of historical as well as speculative fiction aimed at a different segment of the science-fiction audience than ***Star Ace***. With shape-shifting aliens who are determined to bring all possible timelines into one, the Time Corps Agent has his work cut out for him keeping anachronisms out of a particular era, thwarting or straightening out any anomalies created by the alien plots, and tracking down renegade time travellers who manipulate the fabric of time to their own ends.

In addition to the investigative parts of a ***Timemaster*** adventure, many scenarios include a mass combat where a player character can affect the outcome of a battle. To facilitate mass battles, ***Timemaster*** counters have movement and identification factors printed on them, and can represent not only individuals, but also units of varying sizes. Both roleplayers and wargamers have commented on how well they liked this game feature.

Star Ace is a science-fiction/science-fantasy game which appeals to gamers who prefer swashbuckling action and adventure on a galactic scale as opposed to volumes of scientific theory. ***Star Ace*** does not bog itself down with physics or hard science any more than *Star Wars* did. The game is firmly rooted in the pulp fiction tradition which gave us the stories of "Doc" Smith and C.L. Moore where bold and clever heroes are pitted against immensely powerful and ruthless galactic villains.

Although investigation and problem-solving are integral parts of ***Star Ace***, so is combat. Various tactical weapons and vessels are given in the rules, and more will follow. Players start the game with their own starfighters so they can fight in deep space as well as planetside. Not that every situation can be solved with brawn, but a Han Solo-type character was never noted for his glib tongue and use of interpersonal skills in avoiding a sticky situation. Players have the option of thinking or fighting in many ***Star Ace*** scenarios.

Star Ace player-character races are larger than life. The terribly logical and deceptively human-looking Crystal Clones appeal to one side of our nature while the street-wise, catlike, and dashingly attractive Trakans show that creatively-channeled larceny can be fun. Perhaps the most appealing character race is the Kleibor. Coupled with their giant size and good nature is their noetic ability, which gives the Kleibor their mental powers. These twelve-foot-tall polar bears who alternately bumble and fight their way through adventures appeal to the straightforward side of all of us.

(continued on p. 10)

and the level he or she has attained in each. This procedure differs from game to game. In ***Chill,*** skills are bought with Skill Points. So far, so good. Unfortunately, the number of skill points you get is determined by the roll of one die, with not even a bell curve to help you out — a very serious flaw, in my estimation.

In ***Timemaster,*** characters are given two "required skills" — Historical Specialty (meaning the player knows the history of his or her "native" time), and Time Corps Stunner (a weapon skill) — plus two others of his or her choice.

In ***Star Ace,*** the skills available to PCs are determined, in part, by the branch of the Star Teams they choose to join. There are four branches (or "Free Orders") from which to choose, each with a different specialty. All ***Star Ace*** PCs start out with two automatic skills — Spacecraft Piloting and Noetic Defense Mode. Players then choose three more skills, two from their Order's specialty and one of their choice.

In ***Star Ace,*** unlike ***Chill*** and ***Timemaster,*** you don't necessarily need a skill in order to do what you want. Some things — swinging a sword, for instance — can be done by anyone, rolling against the appropriate attribute (Agility in the case of the sword) to determine success or failure. Such skills are called "non-exclusive." Other skills must be learned and practiced; these "exclusive" skills include Spacecraft Repair and the like. Only people with that skill can even attempt to fix a spaceship.

Skills in all three games begin at a level determined by appropriate attribute scores. Skills can be improved beyond the base level by spending experience points earned during the course of play. ***Chill*** players can progress from Student (which gives the player a 15% increase over the basic skill level), to Teacher (an additional 15%), and to Master (yet another 15% increase).

The Student-Teacher-Master skill modifier sequence is repeated in ***Timemaster.*** Each skill can be bought (or raised to) Specialist, Expert, or Master level. Unfortunately, the artificiality is heightened by the addition of Time Corps "ranks": Characters progress through ten ranks, with each rank being further subdivided into ten grades. (Whew! Even ***D&D*** was never like this!) Characters go up in rank by accumulating Success Points. Success Points and higher ranks allow players to acquire new skills or improve in skills they already have — magically!

Skill levels in ***Star Ace*** increase when players progress from Rookie to Veteran to Ace. Skills also improve when characters advance through the ranks of their Order. Each Order has twelve ranks; in order to progress from one to the next, PCs must rack up set numbers of "kills" (enemy vessel or vehicle destroyed, enemy base overrun, etc.).

In concept, this sounds workable — the idea of promotion through the ranks makes some sense in the context of paramilitary organizations like the Time Corps or the Star Teams. The execution is a problem, however. One has to ask why technicians go up in levels by killing, rather than for being technicians; why "brains" get credit for killing, rather than reading minds; why everyone gets credit only for killing. Why not allow advancement for roleplaying, for acting in a manner consistent with the description of the races and the arbitrary character class system established in the game rules? How about encouraging meaningful interaction between player characters and NPCs? Limiting experience points to success in combat — though certainly a time-honored practice — just doesn't make sense.

Special Abilities

In addition to "normal" attributes and skills, characters in the three Pacesetter games have special abilities far beyond those of mortal men. In ***Chill***, player characters with high Perception or Willpower scores may tap the forces of the Unknown through the use of "The Art." The Art takes three forms: Communication (telepathy), Restoration (healing), and Protection disciplines. Of course, the forces of evil tap into the great Unknown through similar (though vastly more powerful) talents called "Evil Way" skills.

In ***Timemaster,*** characters have Paranormal abilities. Each PC starts with two Paranormal Talents — Paranormal Memory (the ability to "remember" how things "should be" despite changes brought about by time travellers), and one other talent of the player's choice. Among the talents available are the ability to read minds, sense the significance of NPCs or historical events, shift time backward one round (!), and so on. Obviously, clever use of such potent abilities can spell the difference between success and failure. (Equally obvious should be that the evil Demoreans have such powers too . . .)

In ***Star Ace,*** characters have "noetic" skills — special mental abilities roughly analogous to the Art and Paranormal skills of the earlier games. Each player starts out with "Noetic Defense Mode" — a kind of telepathic screen. Other noetic skills may be available to players as well.

Check, Please

Now, how are all of these attributes, skills, and special abilities used? "Ability Checks" are the heart of the Pacesetter system. There are General checks and Specific checks. The distinction is crucial to the flavor of the games. In fact, there are few roleplaying games which wouldn't benefit from a good hard look at this distinction.

General checks are made when a player needs to know only whether an attempt succeeded or failed. Do I see the book? (Yes/no answer.) Can I pick up the rock? (Yes/no answer.) To make a general check, a player rolls percentile dice, trying for a result that is less than or equal to his or her ability score. The ability used is determined by the situation and the gamemaster.

A player who needs to know the *degree* of success resulting from a skill use must make a Specific check. Again, percentile dice are rolled; if the roll is less than or equal to the appropriate ability score, the player finds the "attack margin" — the difference between what was required and what was rolled.

Defense Column

Attack Margin	Ability Checks 1-15	16-30	Skill Checks 31-45	46-60	61-75	76-90	91-105	106-120	121-135	136+
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	LK	L	L	L	L	S	S	S	S	S
1-4	M	M	L	LK	L	LK	L	S	S	S
5-9	H	MK	M	L	L	L	L	L	LK	S
10-29	C	H	MK	M	M	M	LK	L	L	L
30-49	C	C	H	M	MK	M	M	MK	L	LK
50-69	CK	CK	C	H	H	H	M	M	M	M
70-89	CK	CK	CK	CK	H	H	H	H	M	M
90-94	CK	CK	CK	CK	CK	HK	H	H	H	H
95-99	CK	CK	CK	CK	CK	CK	HK	HK	H	H
100+	CK	CK	CK	CK	CK	CK	CK	HK	HK	H

The Pacesetter Action Table. Keyed to percentile rolls — and more particularly, to the margin by which a roll succeeds — the table's results are interpreted according to their contexts. If you're firing a pistol, an "H" result indicates a Heavy wound for the target; the same "H" result indicates High success if you're making a skill check, or Harsh damage in unarmed combat.

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Now, move over to the universal action table included with all three games. The attack margin is cross-referenced with the difficulty of the task to yield a result ranging from Limited success all the way to Complete success. Having arrived at a success rating, the gamemaster must apply common sense (or check a table elsewhere in the book corresponding to the specific situation or skill use) in assigning actual game value to the result. Whew!

If the process sounds complicated, take heart in the knowledge that it's easier to do than to describe. I'll bet the first draft of the ***Chill*** rules was a nightmare!

Tabula (anything but) Rasa

The "universal" table idea is appealing, but poorly executed and, in the end, a very mixed blessing. (Frankly, I'm not entirely convinced a satisfying single table system is possible, but that's another story). Anyone who buys ***Chill, Timemaster,*** or ***Star Ace*** thinking to find a game requiring no page-flipping and no ref screen is in for a surprise — and not a pleasant one.

Just to give you an idea of the problems caused by the action table, here are *some* (not all, some) of the sub-charts the gamemaster must consult to find the meaning of a general result on the table (these from ***Chill***):

Knowledge result key (p.17); Research result key (p. 17); Acting skill key (p. 18); Investigation key (p. 19); Language, contemporary, key (p. 20); Legend/Lore key (p. 21); Mechanics key (p. 21); Modeling key (p. 22) . . .

There are approximately thirty skills in ***Chill*** (the other games have a similar number), many of which require chart-checking (or fudging) to determine specific results. Checking charts slows the game down; making things up leaves everything in the hands of the gamemaster — the question becomes, why bother having an action table at all?

And the problems with the chart are not limited to logistics; there are other problems. Chief among these is the random element thrown in when checking the effects of ranged weapon combat. When you fire at another character, you determine that character's defense column by random die roll! What's the sense in that? A more logical approach might have been to allow the target to dodge and use a defense column corresponding to his or her dodge score, or the target could choose not to dodge and use his or her Agility score, or something. Anything would be more sensible than a random die roll.

In defense of the action table, you do get a real sense of varying degrees of success in skill use. Few other games bother with that sort of thing. Also, you can "call your shots": If you want to achieve a very specific result, you can tell the gamemaster before you attempt to use the appropriate skill — if you roll a "C" result on the table, you've done it! This allows all sorts of interesting effects — disarming shots aimed at weapons, rather than at heads — strangling an opponent into unconsciousness, rather than duelling to the death. Name it and you can do it. A very neat feature.

In addition, all combat results are found on the same page as the table. At least these, probably the most commonly consulted, are easily accessible.

The Sequence of Play

The order of events in a given five-second round of play is nearly identical in all three Pacesetter games. In its most basic form, the sequence of play consists of fourteen (yes, *fourteen*) steps. Incorporating the mass combat rules of ***Timemaster*** or the spaceship combat of ***Star Ace*** adds still more steps.

Basically, the gamemaster declares what NPCs will do; players respond with what they will do; each side (not player, but *side*) rolls for initiative. The side which rolls higher does its thing (with some defensive fire from the other side thrown in); then the side which lost the initiative roll does its thing (with fire from the other side thrown in). Then it's back to step one.

It's not as bad as it sounds (though fourteen-plus steps are a bit daunting at first). The meticulously spelled-out sequence of play seems another indication that the Pacesetter games are aimed at people who need (or want) everything handed to them on a platter. There's a mechanical feeling to the games that may not be for everyone.

Combat

Combat in the Pacesetter games is essentially a series of specific ability checks. There are all sorts of modifiers for movement, obstacles, cover, range, weather conditions, visibility, distractions, and luck (!). So far, nothing out of the ordinary (once you understand the use of the action table).

Where the Pacesetter games really fall down is in weapon differentiation. There just aren't any differences! Oh, ranges vary; rates of fire vary; load capacity varies; but damage is the same whether you're firing a peashooter or a bazooka. Not only that, but, as mentioned above, the defense column used by a target is determined by a random die roll! Wrong, wrong, wrong.

Damaged Goods . . . and Not So Goods

There are two kinds of damage in the Pacesetter system: wound damage and non-wound damage. Generally, armed combat causes wound damage and unarmed combat causes non-wound damage. Especially good rolls on the Action Table cause both kinds of damage.

Non-wound damage is taken directly off the Stamina score until that score reaches zero. A character with no Stamina remaining falls unconscious.

Wound damage is handled in two different ways in the Pacesetter games. In ***Chill,*** there are five kinds of wounds: Scratches, Light, Medium, Heavy, and Critical. Each character takes two of each wound type. If a character has already taken his or her allotment of a particular type of wound, any subsequent wounds of that type are "bumped up," and become the next most serious type. Any character with a Critical wound dies as soon as his or her Stamina score reaches zero.

As if knowing how silly and arbitrary the ***Chill*** damage system was, Pacesetter wasted no time in correcting the problems in their subsequent releases. Both ***Timemaster*** and ***Star Ace*** feature a much more sensible damage system. In the later games, no distinction is made between wound types; characters take a certain number of hits, determined by their Stamina scores, and are considered Critically wounded when they have just three hits left. Old-fashioned and unrealistic this may be, but it sure plays better than the ***Chill*** system.

In a half-hearted attempt to make the games more realistic, ***Timemaster*** and ***Star Ace*** include the option of specific hit locations in combat. Specific effects for head, hand, and arm hits are given but, curiously, no such effects are described for torso, leg, or foot shots! The word "ridiculous" springs immediately to mind.

Timemaster and ***Star Ace*** include armor rules, to increase character survivability. At first glance, these armor rules appear both simple and sensible: Each kind of armor has a numerical rating. In order to penetrate armor, an attack must first succeed, and then call for Stamina loss higher than the armor's rating. So far, so good. Then comes the unfortunate part — if the attack penetrates, it does full damage to the affected area (this, obviously, requires another die roll to determine hit location). And, making matters worse, one successful hit to a particular location means armor in that location provides no more protection! As is so common in the Pacesetter games, a good idea is pretty well ruined by poor execution.

Star Ace must take into account damage to spacecraft, as well as characters. This is handled in straightforward fashion: Each ship's system is assigned a set number of damage boxes. When all the boxes of a particular system are filled, that system stops working. When a craft is reduced to zero "stress points," the craft is totally destroyed.

In addition to the ordinary kinds of damage, the Pacesetter games include some really nifty rules to cover "special" kinds of damage — damage from fire, falling, poison, illness, and the like. These often overlooked aspects of adventuring are well-detailed here. Nice touch.

Those Caissons Keep Rolling Along

Timemaster adds a few wrinkles to the combat system, particularly through the addition of mass combat, aircraft, and armored vehicles. Combat involving heavy weapons — tanks, artillery, cavalry, and the like — has a real boardgame feel. You push counters around; units have attack values, movement rates, and morale values all printed right there on their counters; there are still more tables (some particularly ghastly) covering such things as fire restrictions (i.e., which weapons can harm which types of targets). There is yet another table to determine the result of attacks rolled on the universal action table. Vehicle destruction checks must be made (as a general check against the melee/morale value of the target) . . . Aaaargh!

Combat in ***Timemaster*** takes place on three different levels: Man-to-man (standard RPG combat), Skirmish (a few hundred men, or less, per side), and Tactical (thousands of men per side). Both the

GOODBYE, KANKEE (Pacesetter); $6. Designed by A.L. Hayday. Adventure for ***Star Ace***. 32-page booklet. For 2-6 players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

The first in a series of modules for ***Star Ace, Goodbye, Kankee*** starts with the characters job-hunting to pick up some money to cover their Wilderness Base charges. This leads them from a seedy bar on the anything-goes world of Stalitsa, to a rendezvous at an Imperial Base on the windswept rock of Tamilla, to the polar regions of Emniyet, to the Tarsan homeworld of Shamba, to Earth's Moon, all to deliver a packet of precious gems. En route, the characters get to cope with assassins, wildlife of the hostile variety, and the mysterious "Kankee."

Goodbye, Kankee is what might charitably be called a "romp," but a fun one nonetheless. Despite the danger, the atmosphere is less than totally serious, as the characters have to cope with greedy Crassite "businessmen," double-dealing Gorlons and, of course, the ever-friendly Imperial military. Mr. Hayday has a good idea of how to design an adventure. The scenario does not conclude with the characters killing or blowing up people, places, or things — what a concept!

There's really very little to complain about in this module. Some gamemasters might find it a little too frivolous, but that can easily be changed. The artwork is up to Pacesetter's usual standards, although the artwork in the original rulebooks is far better than Jim Roslof's drawings here.

I would definitely recommend ***Goodbye, Kankee*** to anyone looking for a good time or anyone wanting to get an idea of how sf games (not necessarily ***Star Ace***) should be handled. The uniqueness of the ***Star Ace*** background/history and aliens might make this a bit difficult for adaptation to other games, but the premise of this adventure can be used almost anywhere.

—Steve Crow

Skirmish and Tactical levels offer players the unique opportunity of playing Sergeant York-types, saving the day singlehandedly, roleplaying in the midst of battle. This is achieved through a complicated new sequence of play, alternating mass action (involving not only the PCs, but, perhaps, thousands of other combatants) and roleplaying (during which the PCs can take individual action which may or may not affect the larger battle raging all around).

Air combat is simple and abstract. Aircraft are reduced to broad types like WWII German Fighter, WWII British Fighter, etc. Taking the Pilot skill gives a player the ability to fly anything with wings — from Sopwith Camel to Space Shuttle. (In the context of a time-travel game, with PCs coming from the 72nd century, this may actually make sense.)

Having taken the Pilot skill, a player has only three options in air combat: Straight Flight, Maneuver, or Escape. Straight and Escape are relatively straightforward. Maneuver requires a specific check against the Pilot skill and a check on yet another table to determine the results of the maneuver. And no, you don't get to select the maneuver you want; the dice and the action table determine where you end up. You can't say, "I want to go straight and then turn left, gaining altitude so I can dive on my foe on the next turn"; you're stuck with the generic "maneuver" option and the result of your die roll (usually something like "End up directly behind the enemy craft at a range of 1d10 yards.").

These special forms of combat represent terrific ideas gone awry. It seems as if Pacesetter misjudged the market (a rare mistake on their part). From my perspective, at least, if I want to play a boardgame, I'll play a boardgame. It will be interesting to see how many other roleplayers share my feelings.

Blast Off!

Star Ace adds the option of travel to the stars and combat in outer space. Ship design is written off in one paragraph, which basically tells the gamemaster to wing it! Players are encouraged to use the sample ships provided with the game.

It's worth noting that in ***Star Ace,*** for the first time in a Pacesetter game, weapons are differentiated by the amount of damage they do . . . and about time, too! Unfortunately, this applies only to ship weapons. The basic weapon system is still flawed.

Ship combat (described as "the heart of the game") is run like the air combat in ***Timemaster.*** This makes the learning easy and the playing so-so. All the criticisms of dogfighting in the air still apply . . . unfortunately. There are a few twists, like ground attacks and boarding enemy craft, but overall, there's not much to be said.

What's A Gamemaster To Do?

Is the Pacesetter system "user-friendly"? Sorry, but the answer isn't a simple "yes" or "no." In many respects, the games are quite easy to gamemaster. Neophyte Chill, Continuum, and Campaign Masters will find charts (and specific die rolls) for determining NPC attitudes, results of bribery attempts, and the like — the sorts of things which come naturally with experience but often require major backing-and-filling on the part of a new gamemaster. Pacesetter CMs simply don't have to worry about such matters. Just roll the dice and there you are.

This sort of specificity can be a problem, however. The movement, terrain, and vehicle rules in ***Chill,*** for example, seem especially finicky, requiring all too much chart-checking. In fact, at times it seems like *everything* requires chart-checking: "Let's see . . . I'm in hilly terrain (modifier chart check), in a car (modifier chart check), at night (modifier chart check), I'm turning around (modifier chart check), and I want to shoot at a target behind cover (modifier chart check)." That's about 82 chart checks to determine total die roll modifiers. Then you get to roll on the action table to see if you hit and *then* you get to check another chart to find out the result of your shot. How could a game not stop dead?

The Finish Line

Are the Pacesetter games any good? Yes, no doubt about it. Are they worth the money? Again, a definite yes. (How do they fit all that stuff in a box for just $12?) To each of these simple "yes" answers, however, must be appended a resounding "but . . ."

If you're looking around for an RPG to pass out to your "non-believer" friends, look no further; if you're a ***Chivalry & Sorcery*** fan looking for the last roleplaying system you'll ever need, forget it. Recognize that the Pacesetter games are limited in their scope and appeal, and you won't go too far wrong.

It's unlikely that any experienced roleplayer (or even an inexperienced one, for that matter) is going to run an extended campaign using any of Pacesetter's current offerings. Chances are, newcomers will play for a while and then move on to more challenging systems (perhaps progressing through each of the Pacesetter games along the way). Old-timers will probably play once in a while as a break from "more serious" gaming with established favorites — the simplicity of the systems and the brevity of the (*many*) published adventures makes all of the Pacesetter games ideal changes of pace (no pun intended).

Bear in mind that none of the limitations of the Pacesetter games are bad in and of themselves — in fact, such "change of pace" games seem to be the coming thing. Just look at SJ Games' own ***TOON,*** and ***Paranoia*** from West End Games. And who knows what the future holds for Pacesetter — they just might come up with a worldbeater yet. Maybe we'll see "Expert" ***Chill*** someday, or "Advanced" ***Star Ace.*** And we haven't seen a Pacesetter fantasy RPG yet. Who knows?

The three Pacesetter RPGs are maddening. There are so many good ideas obscured by clumsy execution; there are so many silly rules written in remarkably engaging fashion; there is so much good advice for gamemasters, in the service of clunky mechanics.

Add just a touch of chrome here, a dash of spice there, *second editions as soon as possible,* and the ugly-duckling system could turn into a beautiful swan. Only time will tell, and if Pacesetter maintains the, well, pace and level of professionalism they've shown to date, time is one thing about which they won't have to worry: They'll be around for a long time to come.

CHILL: Adventures Into the Unknown *(Pacesetter Ltd.); $12. Designed by Gali Sanchez and Garry Spiegle; developed by Mark Acres and Ethan Sharp; written by Michael Williams. Horror roleplaying game. 8½" x 11" 64-page Campaign Book, 32-page "Horrors from the Unknown" book, 21" x 27" two-sided mapsheet, 140 color counters, 8-page introductory folder, 16-page adventure folder, three inked 10-sided dice, boxed. For referee and one to eight players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.*

TIMEMASTER: Adventures in the 4th Dimension *(Pacesetter Ltd.); $12. Designed by Mark D. Acres, Carl Smith, and Michael Williams; written by Michael Williams. Time-travel roleplaying game. 8½" x 11" 64-page "Travelers' Manual," 32-page "Guide to the Continuum," 21" x 27" two-sided mapsheet, 140 color counters, 16-page introductory adventure, three dice, boxed. For referee and one to eight players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.*

STAR ACE: Adventures in Space *(Pacesetter Ltd.); $12. Designed by Mark Acres and Gali Sanchez; developed by Mark Acres, Carl Smith, and Michael Williams. Science-fiction adventure roleplaying game. 8½" x 11" 64-page "Star Team Basic Training Manual," 32-page "Wilderness Briefing Manual," 21" x 27" two-sided mapsheet, 140 color counters, 16-page introductory adventure, three dice, boxed. For referee and one to eight players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.* □

Pacesetter Says:

That brings us up to date on the present games, but what does the future hold? ***Chill*** has 25mm miniatures and a Swedish translation called ***Chock*** coming in May. Imagin-If is licensed to use art from all our products for T-shirts, and currently we are working on licensing deals for ***Star Ace*** and ***Timemaster*** miniatures, German, Italian, and French translations, as well as the screenplay for ***Chill.***

With the release of ***Wabbit Wampage*** and the ***Chill*** boardgame, Pacesetter moves into adventure boardgaming. ***Wabbit Wampage*** is a hilarious game of mindless mayhem in which homicidal hares fight a determined farmer. The ***Chill*** boardgame sends envoys of SA.V.E. into a haunted house which destroyed a previous team. Characters who start as friends may become minions of an evil creature, and envoys must cooperate to destroy one of ten evil creatures from the unknown before they are destroyed.

Pacesetter has designed a breakthrough in roleplaying, the ***Instant Adventure*** roleplaying game. With this system, players do not have to generate characters, read rules, or waste playing time with game mechanics. After opening the box, the inexperienced referee has friends playing as soon as he reads two pages . . . less reading than required to play ***Monopoly.***

There isn't much more to say. After all, Pacesetter moves!

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What's Behind the Combat System

Twilight: 2000 Design Notes

Frank Chadwick

Ever since we at GDW published *Twilight: 2000* we've been receiving a lot of comments on the game, particularly the combat system. For some reason, the combat system excites a great deal of passion, and people seem to love or hate it. Unfortunately, there was not a great deal of space in the game for designer's notes, and so there is no explanation of how I arrived at the system as it currently stands. When *Space Gamer* asked if I'd like to write an article on the subject, it seemed like the perfect opportunity.

Basics

When I began work on the combat system, there were a number of important criteria which ultimately shaped the system. First, the system had to be mechanically simple. I wanted there to be as little calculation, as few actual steps, and as few special cases and rules as possible. Second, I wanted the combat system to be as universal as possible; radically different systems for dealing with attacks on vehicles and people would make for awkward weapons descriptions for those weapons useful against both. Likewise, different systems for different types of personal combat cause problems with integrating damage results. (If you are beaten half to death, burned half to death, and shot half to death, are you dead or just half dead or what?) Third, I wanted the system to reflect the relatively high effectiveness of modern small arms. Fourth (and in seeming contradiction to the third point), I wanted the combat system to be survivable. I felt this was particularly important to an extended roleplaying game dealing with an essentially violent environment.

Hit Probability

This is an area that I honestly thought I would take a great deal of static over, but I was pleasantly surprised. In the game it is extremely difficult to hit someone, even close up. In fact, at ranges where it is child's play to hit a man-sized target on a rifle range it is still an iffy proposition to score an actual hit. My reason for departing from firing range accuracy is that firefights have never generated anywhere near the number of hits you would expect by extrapolating from firing range statistics. In fact, I suspect that the hit probabilities are, if anything, generous. Even firefights at extremely close range, like several feet, often generate surprisingly few casualties, and a unit will routinely expend *thousands* of rounds of small arms ammunition for each hit it inflicts. In the game it takes a much lower volume of fire to begin producing casualties.

Once I had a hit probability system I was comfortable with for small arms, I had to integrate anti-vehicle weapons, and do so with as little fuss as possible. Hit probability statistics are available for most large caliber guns, but they refer to the chances of hitting a vehicle-sized target, and immediately the spectre of target size modifiers reared its ugly head.

Fortunately, I fought back the temptation to take the easy way out (easy for me, the designer, but a pain in the backside for players). Instead, what I ended up with was the rangefinder bonus in the game. By adding this in, I managed to separate rangefinding from weapon ballistics, which was necessary anyway. By making the rangefinder bonus apply only to vehicle-sized targets and larger, I managed to get the effects of a target size modifier where it counted, without having to fuss with it all the way through the rules. All in all, a happy solution.

Armor Penetration

Since both personal armor and armored vehicles would be present in the game, I realized from the start that the question of armor penetration would have to be addressed directly and fairly forcefully. I knew that with as many tank freaks out there as there are, having categories like "light, medium, heavy, very heavy" for armor just wouldn't cut it. I also wanted an armor and penetration system that was easy for the gamer to understand, not only from a mechanical point of view but also in terms of its rationale. As a result, I adopted a scale based on millimeters of steel, which makes for a system fairly open to examination; my armor and penetration values are not hidden under piles of obtuse calculations.

Although I won't profess to expert status on large caliber ballistics and penetration, it is at least something that I've been working with on my other designs for the last couple years, and so it isn't real intimidating. Small arms penetration, however, was virgin ground. Fortunately, Marc Miller here at GDW is something of a small arms expert in his own right, and was of considerable assistance throughout the project. The actual decisions, however, were mine, and thus any inaccuracies in the system are my responsibility, not his.

The resulting system is very straightforward and open to examination. The design decision to simplify firing by dealing with four distinct range bands imposed some compromises, but I don't feel that they are serious distortions of reality. In retrospect (and it is always easier to see these things when looking back), the one area of the penetration mechanics that bothers me is the sharp fall-off of energy at extreme ranges. No one has written in complaining about this, and I suspect that (as in the "real world") very few firefights are conducted at extreme range. However, for those of you who have ammo to burn, retaining long range damage/penetration at extreme range produces a closer fit to reality, and I recommend it.

Wound Profile

The thorniest problem I had to deal with in the combat system was the actual effect of a gunshot wound on the target. After as much time and thought as I put into the system, I have to admit to reacting very negatively to people who critique it by presenting their own view of reality as if it were proven and demonstrable fact and then sneering because the game system doesn't match that view. If the game research led me to any conclusion, it is that we really still do not have a sufficiently sound grasp of wound physics to predict the exact result of any particular gunshot wound, and any pretense to the contrary is usually based primarily on ignorance rather than knowledge.

In October of 1984, during the final design phase of the game, I had the opportunity to attend the two-day Small Arms Symposium at the J.F.K. Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg. Although my schedule was pretty tight, I made time for it — and later was very glad that I did. Among the twenty-plus presentations at the symposium was one by Dr. Martin Fackler entitled "Method for Predicting

Wound Profile," which summarized all of the latest findings of the Wound Ballistic Laboratory at Letterman Army Institute of Research (of which Dr. Fackler is the director). Some readers out there will perhaps remember an old Firesign Theatre album entitled *Everything You Know Is Wrong*. That might have made an equally appropriate title for Fackler's presentation.

Most of what we know about wound ballistics has been based on actual battle casualties and suppositions as to how the wound occurred. The Wound Ballistic Laboratory has instead been concentrating on analysis of controlled live firings into very large gelatin blocks (of the same consistency as muscle tissue), supplemented by limited controlled fires into anesthetized lab animals. The gelatin blocks enable high speed photography to actually record the behavior of a round in a resisting medium and measure hydrostatic shock effects. I had a chance to talk with Dr. Fackler later, and I could probably go on for pages about this, but will limit myself to a few interesting findings.

Bullet Tumble: The popular notion of bullet tumble is that small, high velocity bullets (due to their instability) tumble through the body, while larger bullets tend not to, and that the tumble is constant throughout the passage of the bullet through the target. Wrong. *All* bullets are stable, *all* bullets tumble, and *all* bullet tumble consists of a single 180-degree change in orientation after entering the wound. The bullet then continues in its trajectory, but rear-end first. As a considerable amount of the tissue damage occurs as a result of the tumble, the *length* of the bullet is one of the most important elements in determining its wounding potential.

Wound Cavitation: Most high velocity combat rounds create a permanent wound cavity the diameter of the bullet and a much larger temporary cavity, which varies with the kinetic energy of the round. This large temporary

Reviewing A Review:

Frank Chadwick Responds to Greg Porter

I know, I know. Every time a designer gets an unfavorable review he screams "foul!" and then bitches and moans about how tough life is. I'm not real crazy about reading that sort of thing myself, but Greg Porter's comments do, it seems to me, at least require some response. In his review in *Space Gamer* 74 he describes ***Twilight: 2000***'s combat system as "abysmal" and supports this with what purports to be a representative example of play. In this example, a soldier wearing a ballistic helmet and Kevlar vest is hit in the head and chest by 23mm HE cannon rounds and not injured, succeeds in "ventilating" several tanks and APCs with his G-11 submachine gun, and is then finally disabled, but not killed, when hit by a 75mm HE round.

Well, one thing at a time. In the game it is true that 23mm HE cannon rounds hitting a character in the chest wearing a Kevlar vest will just knock him down, and that strains reality a bit, doesn't it? Even given a 10-year advance in the state of the art in personal protection, a 23mm HE round is going to do some damage, even if it doesn't penetrate the vest, through concussion and momentum ("blunt trauma," to get technical). What would be required here would be an additional damage system for blunt trauma that would cover broken bones and internal injury. I decided, however, that an additional damage routine was not justified for just one case. Yes, *one* case. Of the twenty-plus large caliber rounds in the game, the 23mm HE round is the only one which cannot penetrate a Kevlar vest. A 23mm API round (just as cheap and common as the HE round) will go through Kevlar like butter, as will any heavy machine gun.

Furthermore, if the 23mm HE round hits the head, half the rounds will hit the unprotected head (instead of the ballistic helmet) and blow the guy's head off. Any hits in the arms or legs will immediately incapacitate the fellow. Any non-penetrating hits to the vest or helmet make the guy vulnerable to fragmentation to his unprotected body parts. Given all this potential for lethal collateral damage from the hit, I didn't feel that the extra damage procedure was necessary. And it should be clear from this that Greg's example is about as far from representative as you can get.

Next, ventilation of tanks and APCs with the G-11. The G-11 in the game fires a special high velocity armor-piercing round designed to defeat light armor, and that it can do so should not be a real big surprise. However, the ammunition is extremely rare, so rare that players cannot even start the game with any and have to be fairly lucky to find any. (There's only a 40% chance that a character will find any in a major city, of which there are two left in all of Poland.) The G-11 is hardly a typical weapon, either in performance or availability. By the way, its classification as a submachine gun is due to its high rate of fire and very easy handling characteristics, which enable it to be fired with the same ease as a submachine gun. Technically it is an assault rifle, but characterizing it as such would make it less effective than it is. Greg should be careful not to read too much into its name.

One important point that Greg glosses over in his example is what happens when his typical soldier "ventilates" the APCs and tanks. Nothing happens in the example, because nothing much happens in the game. The G-11 round may go through the side of an APC or the overhead armor on the engine grate of a tank, but will not have enough remaining energy to damage any internal components. It may cause a light wound to an occupant, but I don't find that out of line considering the type of ammunition I am projecting for it. Considering that Afghan Mujahadeen are putting Mauser rounds at close range through the sides of BTR-60s and killing the drivers, I suspect that this may be generous to the APC occupants, rather than vice versa.

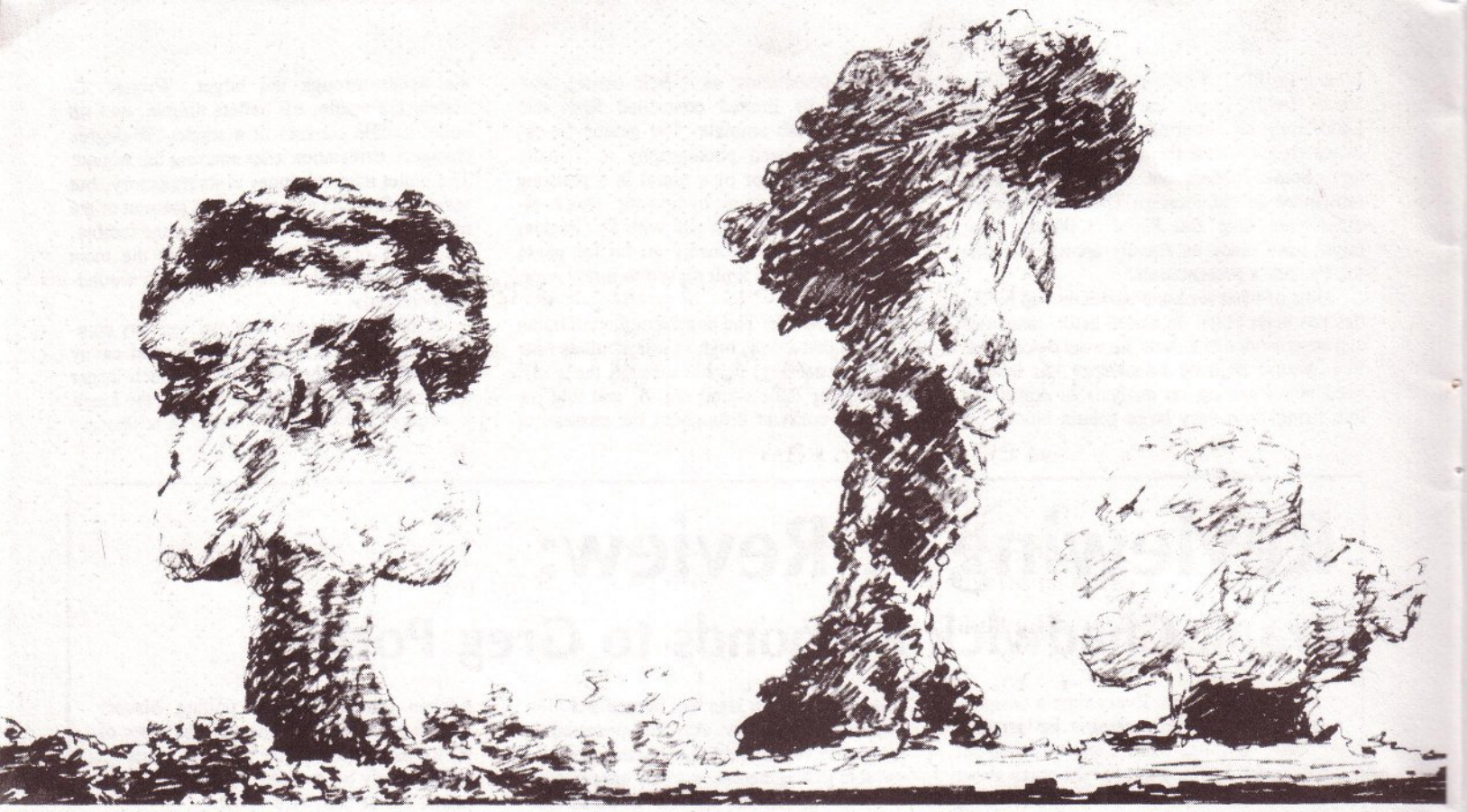
Finally, in Greg's example the player is hit by a 75mm round and "It doesn't quite kill him, but it will suffice." How it doesn't quite kill him is a mystery to me. The average character has a hit capacity of 30 in the chest. Four times this, or 120, will kill him. The average 75mm HE round will do 280 hits, which will kill anyone, Kevlar vest or not.

The combat system in ***Twilight: 2000*** isn't perfect, and I think Greg's review pointed out one anomaly that it produced. I still feel it is an unimportant one, both because of its extreme rarity and because in the example given the player would probably get done in by factors Greg chose to ignore (like fragmentation of hits). It is always dangerous, it seems to me, to say that a system is poorly thought out because of one anomaly.

I don't want to trivialize the anomaly. My penetration data for HE rounds was based on very large rounds. While the blast is the main component there, smaller HE rounds have a higher proportion of their damage caused by the actual kinetic energy of the projectile, and therein lies the rub. I should not have been so hasty in applying a universal HE armor modifier to all weapons based upon what works for a 155mm howitzer. If I may, therefore, I would like to propose a "repair kit." Change the following armor multipliers:

23mm HE: from x10 to x5
25mm HE: from x10 to x6
30mm HE: from x10 to x7
40mm HE: from x10 to x8

—Frank Chadwick



cavity is visually shocking, but closes up relatively quickly (tens of minutes) and appears to cause no serious cellular trauma to muscle tissue. Its effects are much like a severe bruise. The permanent cavity appears to be the extent of serious trauma, and it is determined by the diameter of the bullet (and its length at the point of tumble).

Hydrostatic Shock: Almost all of our assumptions about hydrostatic shock appear to have been mistaken, and it does not now appear to be significant in producing damage. While there is a clear and measurable hydrostatic overpressure wave caused by bullet impact, it passes through tissue too quickly to damage the cells. The single exception to this is when hydrostatic overpressure is applied to a rigidly contained system. (This is why a sealed tin can blows up when you shoot it on the pistol range.) However, the human body, including the circulatory system, is sufficiently elastic to absorb the hydrostatic shock of any known bullet. The one exception is the head; the skull is sufficiently rigid and a comprehensive enough containment vessel to make hydrostatic shock a severe danger from head wounds.

All actual supposed examples of hydrostatic shock wounds (usually characterized by gaping exit wounds) in fact appear to be due to multiple exit wounds. In fact, even European researchers who are advocates of the hydrostatic shock theory have been unable to duplicate the effects in a laboratory with anesthetized animals on a consistent basis; all experiments which produced the symptoms of hydrostatic shock were accompanied by bullet disintegration, and thus multiple exit wounds. (I suppose I should add here that jacketed combat rounds do not normally disintegrate in the body.)

What Does It All Mean?

In listening to Dr. Fackler's presentation and in my brief talk with him later, I was impressed that the man who is perhaps the most knowledgeable researcher in wound ballistics in the country made no pretense of predicting the medical effects of a gunshot wound. We are just beginning to understand the effects of a gunshot wound on muscle tissue; its effects on the skeletal system and a variety of internal organs are areas that have yet to be subjected to any significant controlled study.

The wound modelling system I proposed is admittedly a fairly abstract and simplified one, but one which is based on a fair amount of research and some thought. I have no illusions as to its "accuracy"; our knowledge of wound ballistics is so limited that we do not have the ability to produce a completely "accurate" computer-driven model, let alone one suitable for a roleplaying game. But a system of some sort is necessary, and several principles guided me.

First, I noticed that several times as many people survive gunshot wounds as die of them. Therefore, it seemed obvious that a gunshot wound is not necessarily fatal.

Second, in the heat of combat people often suffer fairly serious injuries and continue to function normally. This is due in part to shock and in part to the fact that people in mortal danger are usually higher than a kite on adrenaline, noradrenaline, testosterone, and all sorts of other interesting glandular secretions. (This, by the way, has something to do with the remarkably poor marksmanship displayed in combat as well.)

Third, the effects of a gunshot wound can in many respects be modelled by random damage and random death, given how little we know about actual internal wound physics. However, this is very unsatisfying from a game point of view. Therefore, it seemed best to have some sort of linear damage system, with incremental damage based on a variety of ballistic characteristics of the bullet.

Fourth, if a simple system (which I felt was required) has to err, it is better to err in favor of survival than in favor of lethality; this makes for a better game.

Based on this, I developed the wound modelling system for ***Twilight: 2000*** and where error was mandated by the simplicity of the system, I deliberately erred in favor of survival. Given our lack of reliable knowledge in this area, I feel that discussion of this issue would be most constructive if it centered around game utility and overall feel. As I said above, criticism which seems based on the attitude that "I know what's *really* happening here and you missed it with this system" leaves me cold.

There is one aspect of the wound model that I freely admit is completely inaccurate; it is impossible to kill a man with a single rifle shot to the chest. You can knock him down, you can seriously injure him and knock him unconscious, and he may die of an infection later, but you cannot kill him with a single shot through the heart. From a game point of view, I don't consider this a major problem, but I can understand players who might. If you like, consider using the following rule:

"Any time that a character receives a gunshot wound to the chest which penetrates his body armor and inflicts at least one actual hit point, roll D10. On a roll of 1 the character is dead." □

The **Realistic** After-the-Holocaust Game

NUCLEAR WINTER

by Greg Costikyan

Credits

Design: Greg Costikyan
Development: Joe Balkoski, John M. Ford, and Nick Quane

(1.0) The 90-Minute War Table

1–4 You survive the first strike; roll on table 2.0.
5–6 You are killed in the fireball.

(2.0) Fallout Table

1–5 You survive the fallout with only minor radiation sickness; roll on table 3.0.
6 You are killed by the radiation.

(3.0) Collapse of Civilization Table

1–3 You survive the collapse of the food distribution network, the marauding bands, etc.; roll on table 4.0.
4–6 You die at the hands of looters, from starvation, etc.

(4.0) Nuclear Winter Table

1–6 A cloud of dust encircles the globe. Global temperatures drop by several degrees. Most plant life dies because it does not receive enough light. The glaciers advance. All animals larger than the rat become extinct. You die.

(5.0) *Optional:* If you live in New Jersey, add one to all die-rolls.

(6.0) *Optional:* Each time you take a breath, mark off one breath box. When all six boxes have been marked off, you are dead.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Designer's Notes: For some reason, after-the-holocaust games seem real popular right now. Why is beyond me; I can think of few more depressing environments in which to live. In addition, most such games are patently ludicrous; a few years after a full-scale nuclear exchange, nothing will be left but the rats and the roaches. However, I might as well cash in on the trend, too.

Coming Soon from Costikyan Publishing Empire

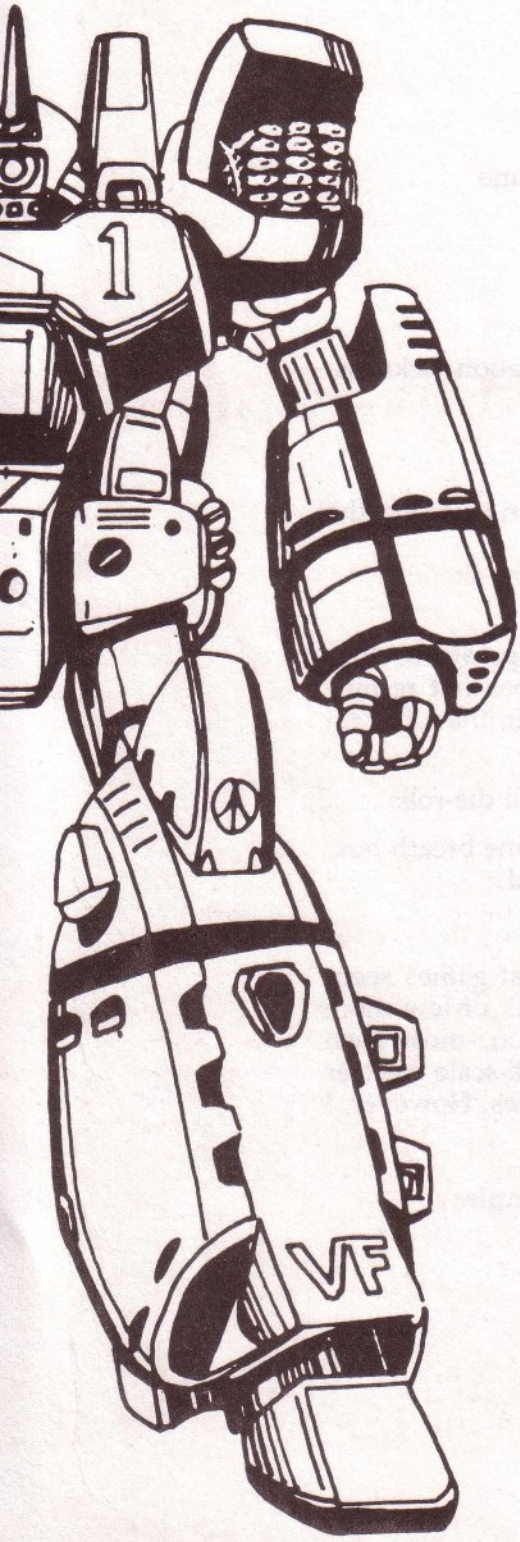
RAT AND ROACH WAR

The sequel to **Nuclear Winter**

Featured Review

BATTL

Aaron Allston



It's possible that giant-robot games will become the next genre flooding the market. Giant robots come as an inevitable result of the Japanese preoccupation with large metal things bounding around the landscape. With Japan's enormous and healthy plastic-models industry supporting the cartoons and movies with beautifully-engineered and intricate articulated robot models, and with greater and greater numbers of the models and cartoons being imported into the US, it should be no surprise that the field would eventually garner some interest in the gaming industry.

One of the first offerings out is ***Battledroids***, FASA's boardgame of giant robot combat. Let's look at it.

Components

Components are what you first see of any game, and FASA hasn't skimped on this product — at first glance. In the ***Battledroids*** box comes a 40-page slick-paper rulebook, two identical 17" x 22" terrain maps, four sheets of ***Cardboard Heroes***-like robot miniatures (two each of two different sheets, each with six robots, plus miscellaneous small-vehicle, terrain, and fire counters), dice and a pair of plastic robot *models* — two robots standing about 3" tall, complete with pieces molded in two colors, and decals, imported from Twentieth Century Imports of Boulder, CO. Additionally, there's an errata sheet.

By and large, the components are nice. The models are of typical Japanese quality, although models this small don't have the really remarkable poseability and other features you find in the larger and more expensive versions.

The rulebook, oddly enough, is arranged like an old Ace Double: Read the game rules through about ¾ of the booklet, then flip the thing upside-down to read the game rationale and background. I consider this to be unnecessary and a nuisance.

The "cardboard miniatures" aren't cardboard at all. They're printed on glossy, very thin paper. If you're going to use them for any length of time, you'll have to glue them carefully to cardstock before use. (My advice is that you laminate them with adhesive plastic sheets first, as this will tend to prevent the kind of warping that glue causes.)

The maps are also on thin gloss paper and don't wear terribly well, but naturally they won't see the kind of wear that cardboard miniatures will. The maps aren't what I'd call glitzy, having some fairly basic terrain patterns on a basic brown background. Since none of the terrain features extend to the edge of the papers, the maps could be considered geomorphic, I suppose.

Playing the Game

As a game, ***Battledroids*** is all right. It comes in three levels of difficulty: Basic, Advanced, and Expert. The rulebook does a good job of organizing and explaining the game mechanics. It makes extensive use of graphics to break up the page and improve readability, it makes equally extensive use of shaded example passages, and it's adequately free of ambiguity.

The Basic Game is a pretty standard move-and-fire shoot-'em-up. We have rules for moving, jumping, and stacking, as well as targeting, range, and firing, plus terrain modifiers for all of the above and damage determination and effects. Overall, the Basic Game is all right as a mini-game, with standard and unsurprising mechanics. It gets dull pretty fast. Note that there's no "hand-to-hand" combat.

In the Advanced Game we add record sheets, more specific weapons uses, rules for robot heat buildup, hit locations, and (finally) hand-to-hand combat among the robots. The Basic Game had damage effects such as "Battledroid Destroyed" and "Battledroid cannot move or fire for 2 turns"; here we get to progressive damage effects. The Advanced Game rules complicate the game to an acceptably challenging level.

The main additions in the Expert Game are the characteristics and effects of the robot pilots ("Droidwarriors") and Critical Hits. The Droidwarriors add a bit of roleplaying to the game (not much — they're even less detailed than characters in ***Car Wars***) and also add some vulnerability to the robots. Critical Hits have the same advantages and disadvantages they do in every other game where they're used: They make lucky shots possible. One shot can kill the Droidwarrior and take the robot right out of the game. Most critical hits aren't quite *that* critical; they tend to do fun things like mess up a robot's sensor or affect its movement or knock out the gyroscopic stabilizers or heat dissipating machinery, all of which call for revised tactics and provide roleplaying opportunities.

After all the progressive game rules, we have Optional Rules, such as different skills for pilots, infantry units (how would you like to attack a giant robot with a jeep?), and robot design rules.

BATTLEDROIDS

All in all, ***Battledroids*** is a pleasant little game. It provides enough optional or advanced material to keep it interesting from game to game. Play is very quick in the Basic Game and substantially slower on your first few tries at the Advanced Game; the Expert Game doesn't add much time at all. I liked it as a game — although I don't think it will ever become a fan favorite or gain a cult following the way games such as *Ogre* have.

However, while playing the game I could never get around one particular problem. It intruded on every game and bothered me each time I opened the box. That problem:

The Campaign Materials

When reviewing a game, you have to ask two questions: How good a game is it, and how well does it simulate what it seems to be trying to simulate?

I thought this was to be a game of giant Japanese robot combat. The use of art and models based on the Japanese cartoons tended to support this opinion, as did the time of the game's release (just as the models are starting to get very big). But it's not.

In the campaign background writeup, the setting is a future-era "dark age" in a time some 500 years after the robots were in their prime. Now, for the most part, they're clunkers, scavenging replacement parts off the dead robots; no new robots are being built. A nice detailed anatomy of the robots is given — it was written by Steve Peterson and George Mac Donald (the latter unfortunately uncredited) of Hero Games. Several worlds involved in these wars, including the personalities heading individual forces, are fairly well delineated — they're fleshed out far more than is necessary for a boardgame.

But none of it *feels* like the Japanese cartoons. Rules such as heat buildup and weary campaign background are just wrong for the genre. It's rather akin to designing a roleplaying game where the characters have superpowers and skintight costumes — and then run about performing political infighting and corporate takeovers a la *Dallas* or *Dynasty*. As the Japanese models and cartoons become more common over here, more and more buyers will be purchasing this game expecting something like the source materials, and they'll be disappointed as I was. They'll have a decent enough game on their hands — but they may not want to play it.

Concluding Remarks

Two last complaints:

The robot miniatures, the plastic ones, are slightly too large for the hexes. They're nice, but inconvenient.

Also, who designed ***Battledroids?*** You can search high and low through the rulebook without finding the game credits; they're buried at the bottom of a couple of chart sheets (pages 16 and 25). Only close scrutiny identifies the designer as Jordan Weisman and the writer as Patrick Larkin. As an editor, I'm embarrassed to see this casual dismissal of credits; as a freelancer, I'm annoyed.

My recommendation? Buy ***Battledroids*** if you'd like a giant-robots boardgame that has nothing to do with the Japanese cartoons. It's a decent game. You won't throw away any of your other games to play ***Battledroids*** full-time, but you'll be adequately entertained.

BATTLEDROIDS (FASA); $15. Designed by Jordan Weisman; written by Patrick Larkin. Giant-robot boardgame. 40-page 8½" x 11" rulebook, two 17" x 22" mapsheets, 4 sheets of paper miniatures, two 3" plastic models (assembly required), two six-sided dice, boxed. For two or more players; playing time 30 minutes to two hours. Published 1984. □

BATTLEDROIDS Variants

by George Mac Donald

Battledroids, the tactical wargame of giant robot combat by FASA, is an interesting attempt to mesh the giant robots of Japanimation with the basics of an American tactical wargame. The game strives to play down the more fantastic elements of its anthropomorphic armored heroes and make the robots seem like "tanks with legs." The result is a unique situation in a game system that is very comfortable to play and easy to learn.

Nothing is so well done, however, that an artful tinkerer can't improve on it. The supply of interesting weapons in the game is limited. Also, there are no rules for the giant melee weapons and shields so prevalent in Japanimation. The rules on heat buildup also have some holes in them. Finally, the rules describing facing place some unrealistic constraints on the game and warp some of the combat situations.

Ranged Weapons

Battledroids contains only a very few weapons. The list below adds four new weapons: the Auto-Laser, Tank Cannon, Heavy Missile Launcher, and Medium-Range Missile Racks.

Auto-Laser: A medium weapon that fires multiple pulses of laser light. For each point that the attacker makes his to-hit roll by, the target takes 2 points of damage. Thus, if an attacker has a to-hit roll of 6+ and rolls a 10, the laser hits at 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 for 5 hits of 2 points each. Divide the damage into 5-point increments and roll hit location once per set of 5 points.

Tank Cannon: A relic of a bygone era, the Tank Cannon is a medium recoilless cannon firing a high-explosive shell at high velocity.

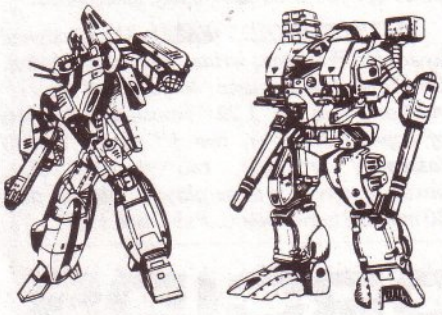
Battledroids Variants — Ranged Weapons

Name	Heat	Minimum	Short	Medium	Long	DMG	Tons	Critical Space	Shots/ Ton
Auto-Laser	8	2	1-4	5- 8	9-12	2+	5.0	2	—
Tank Cannon	1	—	1-5	6-10	11-15	5	5.0	2	30
Heavy Missile Launcher	2	3	1-7	8-14	15-21	8	5.0	3	20
Medium Missile 2-Rack	0	—	1-4	5- 8	9-12	2*	1.5	1	30
Medium Missile 4-Rack	1	—	1-4	5- 8	9-12	2*	3.0	2	15
Medium Missile 6-Rack	2	—	1-4	5- 8	9-12	2*	5.0	3	10
Medium Missile 10-Rack	3	—	1-4	5- 8	9-12	2*	8.0	4	6

Tanks in ***Battledroids*** have 12 tons for weapons, so a tank could carry 1 cannon, 120 cannon shots, and 2 machine guns, each with 200 shots.

Heavy Missile Launcher: This is often a shoulder-fired weapon that resembles a giant bazooka. It can fire one shot per turn. It is based on the Long-Range Missile, with a similar guidance system and scaled-up warhead and propulsion. Because each missile is fired individually, it is aimed better and has a shorter minimum effective range than a Long-Range Missile does.

Medium Missile Rack: A beefed-up Short-Range Missile Rack, with 33% more range and a 10 rack size. Quite useful for times when a Short-Range Missile is too short and a Long-Range Missile is too long.



Melee Weapons and Shields

Giant robots in Japanimation often seem more like medieval knights than walking tanks. Swords and shields are just as appropriate to ***Battledroids*** as lasers and missiles.

The proper melee weapon for a giant armored robot is a giant sword. Such a sword weighs 1 ton for every 40 tons of robot. The chart below shows the weight of the sword in relation to the weight of the robot.

Robot Weight	Sword Weight
0 to 20 tons	0.5 tons
25 to 40 tons	1.0 ton
45 to 60 tons	1.5 tons
65 to 80 tons	2.0 tons
85 to 100 tons	2.5 tons

Attack Type	Heat Buildup in Target
Lasers	1 per 3 points of damage
Particle Projectile Cannons	1 per 5 points of damage
Missiles, Machine Guns, Cannons, and Tank Cannons	1 per 10 points of damage
Flamers	1 per 2 points of damage

A robot must have a functional arm and shoulder to use a sword. The robot may not fire any weapons on the sword arm on the turn it attacks with the sword.

A sword has a base to-hit of 3, and does one point of damage for every 5 tons of robot. Thus a 50-ton robot would carry a 1.5-ton sword and do 10 points of damage in physical combat.

How does a giant robot defend against a giant sword? With a giant shield, of course. A shield is a giant slab of aligned crystal steel and boron nitride-impregnated monofilament armor that is hung on one of a robot's arms. The shield weighs one ton for every 16 armor factors it has. The largest shield a droid can carry is equal to $\frac{1}{10}$ of its own weight. Thus a 50-ton robot could carry a 5-ton shield with 80 Armor Factors.

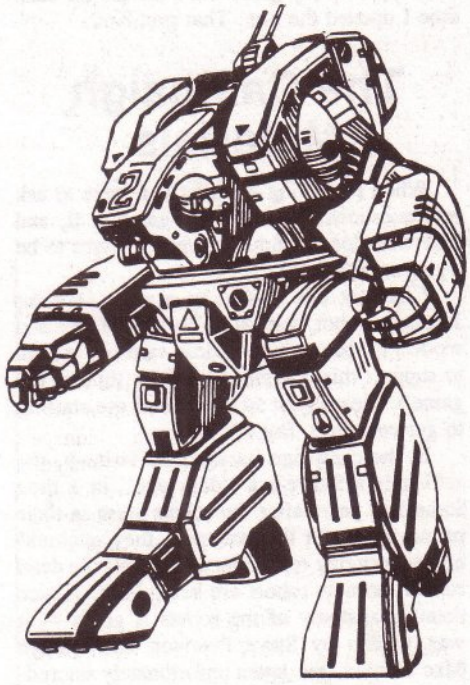
Each turn, at the end of movement, each droid with a shield declares which areas the shield is covering. A shield covers the arm it is attached to and any two other adjacent areas. The covered combinations are: One Leg and Torso location, Head and one Torso location, or Head and other Arm. Any frontal hits against any of these areas are first taken by the armor on the shield. When all of the shield's armor is gone, the shield is gone.

Additional Heat Buildup

The heat buildup inside a droid in combat is one of the major limiting factors in its performance. ***Battledroids*** covers the major things a droidwarrior does to cause his own droid to generate heat. But, as any droidwarrior who has taken a Head hit from a Heavy Laser will tell you, enemy weapons fire can also generate significant heat.

The accompanying chart lists the heat effects of being hit by each of the weapons in ***Battledroids***. Divide the number of points of damage caused by each type of weapon by the listed value; round fractions down. The heat buildup from each attack type is calculated separately from damage.

Thus a target hit by a Heavy Laser (8 points), 6 Long Range Missiles and a Tank Cannon (11 points), and a Flamer (2 points) would add 2 + 1 + 1 = 4 to its Heat Points that turn.



Emergency Facing Changes

Facing in ***Battledroids*** is of paramount importance. Each droid has only a 120-degree field of fire, and may have to set his facing before his opponents move. The first player to move may find that all of his opponents have leapt behind him and he cannot return their fire.

Since droids are flexible at the waist, we will add the ability to make an Emergency Turn. A droid can change the facing of its torso *after* its Movement Phase, but before the Attack Phase. Any droid who makes an Emergency Turn takes a +2 to all to-hit rolls it makes that turn. Thus a droid is only vulnerable to an attacker directly behind it, not all attackers in a 270-degree arc.

All of these rules will make ***Battledroids*** a slightly more complex game and should be considered part of the Expert Rules. But with these rules the game is slightly more flexible and "realistic." ***Battledroids*** is plenty of fun out of the box, and even more fun with these rules. □

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an agency for any modern-era RPG

by Gregg Sharp

PLAYER DATA SHEET

Name: Hellgate Society
Stated Goal: World Domination
Known Illegal Activities: Drug and weapon smuggling, drug and weapon production, extortion, terrorism, kidnapping, theft, conspiracy, espionage, murder, rigged gambling, prostitution, genocide, armed assault, slavery, faginy, and numerous petty crimes.
Scope Of Operation: Worldwide
Wealth: Unknown; believed to be in excess of $12 billion.
Known Locations: None; believed to have a HQ in Berlin area.
Known Peculiarities: Agents are identified by names from French Tarot deck. Reason unknown.
Modus Operandi: Varies. Occasionally at non-secretive crime scenes a Tarot card is left, usually La Mort (Death). Crimes are marked with a singular disregard for life or aesthetics.
Convictions to date: As of 5/1/85, there have been 45 convictions of suspected Hellgate Society members.
Status: Most governments consider the Hellgate Society to be a "boogie man" threat; basically the sort of threat discovered by paranoids. Those that have become convinced of the existence of the Hellgate Society keep this from the public at large.

LEOs (Law Enforcement Officials) are warned to take no chances with suspected Hellgate Society agents. Many keep a vial of cyanide in a false tooth. Hellgate Society agents will take many innocents with them in a suicidal action rather than surrender.

In 1896, Nathaniel Bleaker of Boston discovered a wondrous find in an ancient book. The book was the dread tome *Necrophus* written by the demon Baphomet at the time of the Crusades.

The reference in the book promised great rewards for whoever opened one of the four "Hellgates" hidden around the globe. The reference went on about how to open one of these Hellgates and how to summon the Infernal Hordes through them.

Nathaniel Bleaker made copies of the reference and began the Hellgate Society, devoted to the acquisition of absolute power through the opening of these gates. Since all the Gates must be controlled by the Society in order to open one, none of the Hellgates have yet been opened.

In the spring of 1977, the Hellgate Society secretly owned two oil companies, a radio/television broadcasting system, several newspapers, nearly fifty federal judges and congressmen, two record companies, and a hotel chain. The stated purpose of all this: to recreate the decadence found in Sodom and Gomorrah, to pave the way for the opening of the Hellgates.

At the present, the secret ownings of the Hellgate Society have nearly doubled. To this date, the Hellgate Society has found two of the four Hellgates: one in a Vancouver museum, the other underneath the city of Berlin.

ORGANIZATION

The Hellgate Society recognizes its members with tarot card name/ranks. At the head of the Society is the sinister Le Monde (the World), the leader of the society. At the bottom of the ranks is the Deuce a Denier (Two of Coins).

There are twenty-one administrators or highly skilled superagents (depending on campaign type). If you're playing a superhero RPG, it is suggested that each agent have a power related to the card represented; some samples are given. Horror RPGs should just use the name/rank.

Ranks from the Deuce a Denier to Ten of Swords have no special abilities or powers. However, the higher the rank, the better the agent's equipment will be. The Deuce a Denier might be issued a set of throwing stars, while the Ten of Swords would have a machine gun and several grenades.

Other ranks include the Roi (king), Reine (queen), Valet (jack), Chevalier (knight), and Ace. Suits are Denier (coins), Batons (clubs), Epees (swords), and Coupes (cups).

Departments

Cups: medical, medical research, drug production.

Swords: assassination bureau, espionage section, search teams.

Clubs: weapons research, weapons smuggling, terrorism and extortion.

Coins: financial section, smuggling, economic assassination.

The head of a department is the Ace. The Ace reports directly to one of the following: Cups — Junon, Swords — La Mort, Clubs — Le Chariot, Coins — Bateleur.

All organizations are worldwide, and all ranks of "jack" or above are among the most highly skilled in the field that they represent. Each section has a basic objective for the eventual domination and subjugation of the world. Rivalry between sections is high.

Cups: World domination through the control of pleasure. The Cups operatives are taught that if you control the pleasure, you control the people.

Swords: Control from behind the scenes. By controlling present governments, Sword

operatives believe that they can eventually dominate the world as super-Illuminati.

Clubs: Control through fear. Club operatives believe that through intimidation and fear, they can gain a stranglehold on any political system.

Coins: If you have enough money, you automatically own the world. Through the accumulation of wealth, Coin operatives seek to control all of the world's businesses. Once that is accomplished, all wealth and power will flow from their organization.

Each organization has a central location: Coins — Monte Carlo, Swords — Boston, Clubs — Eider (Peru), Cups — Paris.

The Hellgate Society is not an equal opportunity employer. It does not subscribe to any recognizable moral code.

Many members of The Hellgate Society do not wish to open the Hellgates at all, since they see their own ambitions first.

Most often The Hellgate Society uses normal weaponry and vehicles — such things as semiautomatic rifles and motorcycles. (The Clubs branch in the United States most often uses Uzis and Harley Davidson knuckleheads).

Laboratories are scattered and range from high school complexity to the billion-dollar industrial lab run by the King of Cups. Sorcerous labs were created by Le Bateleur or Le Monde and allow for truly despicable acts.

SCENARIOS

These are simply a few samples to get the referee started. Plots will probably suggest themselves.

Demon on the Loose: Through conjurations, a demon or devil may be released on a rampage. This may or may not have been intentional on the part of the conjurer.

Crime: One of the crimes listed on the Player Data Sheet can be committed in a nearby area. (Suggested for superhero adventures only.)

Gate Discovery: If a third Hellgate is discovered by the Society, the sudden "psychic shock" should hit anyone attuned to the psychic world. Magicians, psychics, and heroes with a danger sense all would immediately get an indeterminate alert. (Is the gate located somewhere well-known to the players? Their headquarters, university, or in the basement at home?)

Attack: If the players have proved to be a real threat to any of the departments of the Hellgate Society, they may be targeted by the Assassination Bureau of the Swords.

Defense: In their search for the other Hellgates, the operatives may turn up something uncontrollable and nasty. In this case they may anonymously contact the PCs or other agencies to deal with the matter.

Escapee: Several forms of experimentation and torture go on within the organization of The Hellgate Society. Example: The operative Le Monde experiments to learn the exact nature of identity. Thus he uses his magics to resculpt physical forms of prisoners. If one of his victims escapes, it could be the precursor of other scenarios.

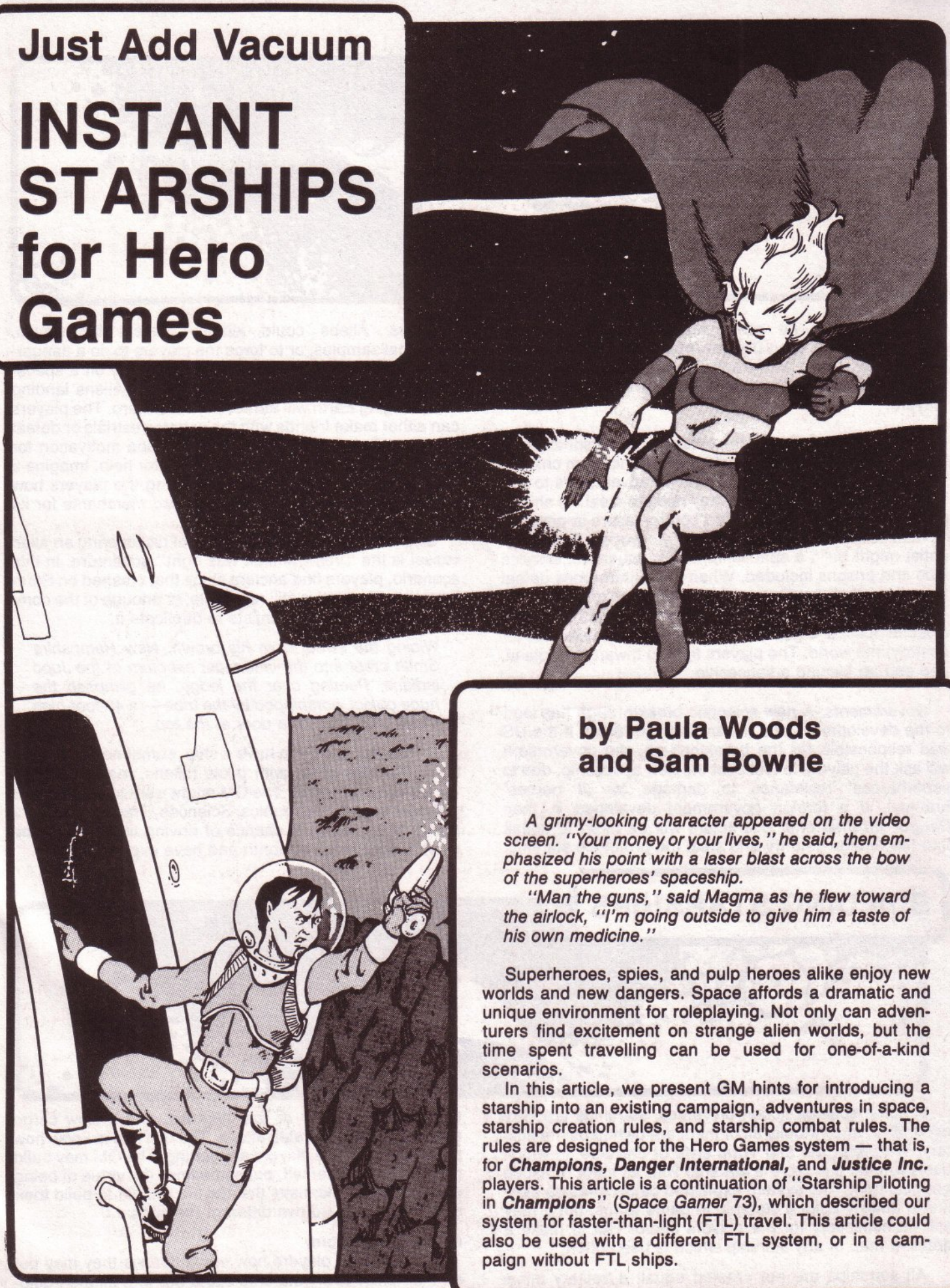
There are dozens of others just waiting for the clever referee. Good hunting. □

Title	Meaning	Suggested powers
Le Monde	The World	Mind Control
Jugement	Judgement	Telepathy
Le Soleil	The Sun	Solar energy powers
La Lune	The Moon	Darkness Control
L'Etoile	The Star	Flight
Le Maison de Dieu	The Lightning Struck Tower	Weather Control
Le Diable	The Devil	Zombie Creation
Temperance		Martial Artist
La Mort	Death	Death-touch
Le Pendu	The Hanged Man	Stasis Generation
La Force	Strength	Super Strength
Le Roue de Fortune	The Wheel of Fortune	Luck/Bad Luck Generation
L'Ermite	The Hermit	Illusion Generation
La Justice	Justice	Duplication/Mimicry
Le Chariot	Chariot	Armored Suits
L'Amoureux	The Lovers	Emotion Control
Jupiter	Hierophant	Lightning/Flight
Imperatrice	Empress	Ego Blast
Junon	High Priestess	Density Control
Bateleur	Magician	Magician
Le Mat	The Fool	Invisibility

Other ranks	Suggested abilities/ equipment
Ace Of Cups	regeneration
Ace Of Swords	photon sword
Ace Of Clubs	telekinesis
Ace Of Coins	precognition
King Of Cups	world-class surgeon
King Of Swords	Olympic-level fencer
King Of Clubs	very skilled martial artist
King Of Coins	stage magician
Queen Of Cups	poisoned darts
Queen Of Swords	sliver gun
Queen Of Clubs	electric stunclub
Queen Of Coins	alchemist
Knight Of Cups	medical researcher
Knight Of Swords	assassin
Knight Of Clubs	weapons researcher
Knight Of Coins	financier
Jack Of Cups	geneticist
Jack Of Swords	ninja
Jack Of Clubs	gadgetmaker
Jack Of Coins	master counterfeiter

Just Add Vacuum

INSTANT STARSHIPS for Hero Games



by Paula Woods and Sam Bowne

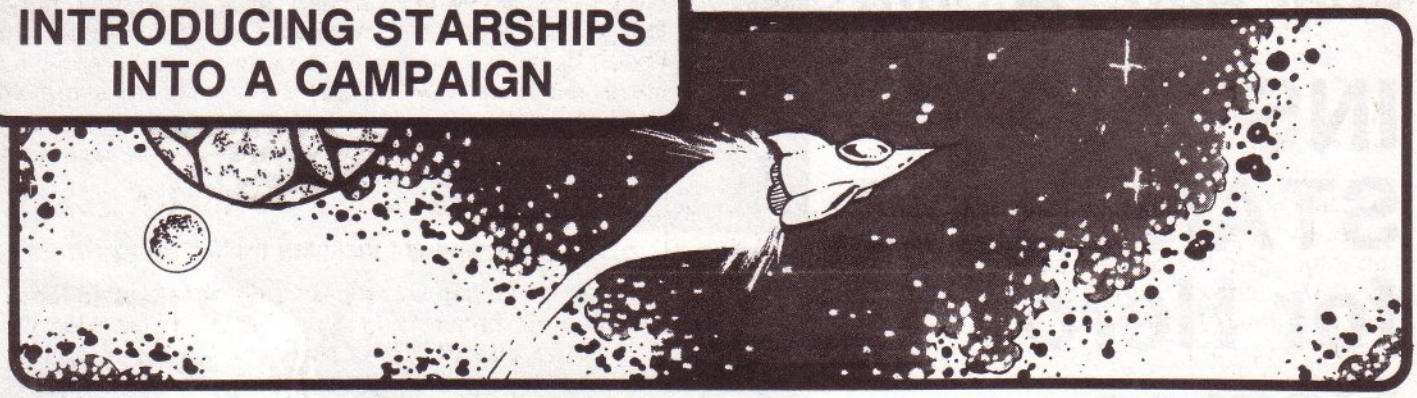
A grimy-looking character appeared on the video screen. "Your money or your lives," he said, then emphasized his point with a laser blast across the bow of the superheroes' spaceship.

"Man the guns," said Magma as he flew toward the airlock, "I'm going outside to give him a taste of his own medicine."

Superheroes, spies, and pulp heroes alike enjoy new worlds and new dangers. Space affords a dramatic and unique environment for roleplaying. Not only can adventurers find excitement on strange alien worlds, but the time spent travelling can be used for one-of-a-kind scenarios.

In this article, we present GM hints for introducing a starship into an existing campaign, adventures in space, starship creation rules, and starship combat rules. The rules are designed for the Hero Games system — that is, for ***Champions, Danger International,*** and ***Justice Inc.*** players. This article is a continuation of "Starship Piloting in ***Champions***" (*Space Gamer* 73), which described our system for faster-than-light (FTL) travel. This article could also be used with a different FTL system, or in a campaign without FTL ships.

INTRODUCING STARSHIPS INTO A CAMPAIGN



Starships can be easily slipped into ***Champions, Justice Inc.***, and even ***Danger International*** campaigns. Everyone can be in on the act. The setting need not be futuristic. Here are three possible sources of spaceships for players:

Mad Scientists: One of the classic pulp personalities is the mad scientist. He can build a spaceship from chicken wire and tar paper. He might ask the adventurers to test his new ship. Or the players may need to steal his ship to prevent him from placing mind control lasers in orbit.

Mad scientists abound in superhero worlds. A mad scientist might build a spaceship as headquarters, science labs and prisons included. When the superheroes defeat the villain, they have an interplanetary vehicle.

Mad scientists in ***Danger International*** may belong to a secret political organization, which plans to take over (or destroy) the world. The players fight to thwart their plans, and end up owning a spaceship.

Governments: A new scientific breakthrough has lead to the development of a faster-than-light drive. If the US was responsible for the breakthrough, the government will ask the players to test-pilot the new spaceship, due to superheroes' resistance to damage (or ***JI*** heroes' bravery). If a foreign government developed it, then ***Danger International*** characters will be hired to sneak into the foreign country and steal the prototype starship.

Aliens: Aliens could kidnap players for slaves, biological samples, or to force the players to do a dangerous job for them. Or heroes may stow away on a spaceship which landed on Earth for refueling. Aliens landing and pillaging Earth will attract any superhero. The players can either make friends with the extraterrestrials or defeat them, gaining control of the ship. A good motivation for heroes to venture into space is a plea for help. Imagine a little fuzzy alien with pointy ears telling the players how his planet is being destroyed by lizard merchants for its ore.

One of the more dramatic ways of discovering an alien vessel is the "Von Daniken was right" adventure. In this scenario, players find ancient ships that crashed on Earth long ago. The ship is still reparable, or enough of the components are left for scientists to duplicate it.

> *Wiping the sweat from his brown, New Hampshire Smith crept into the innermost sanctum of the Jupo indians. Peering over the ledge, he glimpsed the huge object worshipped by the tribe — a 40-foot-high metal cylinder with a door at the top.*

Of course, once you have a ship, someone has to pilot it. Many ships come with pilots (aliens, mad scientists, deranged computers). The GM might want to give players with Mechanics, Electronics, Sciences, Transport skills, 3 points of Luck, etc. a chance of driving the ship. Or the players could take a month and have experts study it.

BUILDING STARSHIPS

In some science fiction universes, starships are very expensive, and virtually all of them are owned by the military. We prefer the *Star Wars* style of universe, in which every lunatic can have a starship with all sorts of exotic gadgets on it. The system explained below enables players to quickly build a starship in game terms, but it may still be necessary for the players and/or GM to make a detailed map of any starship which is used often.

All starships are not created equal; a solitary miner cannot afford armor or fast engines, and a slow cargo ship is helpless if pirates attack. The GM has to know how powerful a ship the players are getting. The GM may build the ship him- or herself, but sometimes (by virtue of being aliens or mad scientists) the players will get to build their own ship. Here are two different methods.

Method 1: Options

The GM tells players how many *options* they may put on their ship. Every starship starts out with all the equip-

ment on the basic ship (see the accompanying description), and options are added to it. The players choose their options from the following sections, subject to the GM's approval. The number of options indicates how powerful and expensive the ship is; ships with the same number of combat-oriented options should be of roughly equal strength.

An option is basically a unit of money. For example, suppose the players save an alien from death, and he decides to reward them by giving them a spaceship. The alien might give the players a spaceship with 20 options on it, of their choice. If they take a Danger Room, it costs as much money (3 options) as a Cloaking Device, but is of no value in combat. The players have to balance comfort against power.

The option cost of an item depends not only on its usefulness, but also on its availability in a given society. The luxury options are less commonly available, because they are harder to produce.

The option system makes it easy for the GM to build a spaceship as part of an ongoing ***Champions, Danger International,*** or ***Justice Inc.*** campaign. In these three games, few players start their character off owning a spaceship. If the GM adds a spaceship to the campaign, no one pays power points for it.

Method 2: Power Points

The characters may purchase a starship just as they would buy a vehicle or headquarters, using power points. For 10 power points (which are subject to no limitations or modifications whatever, but may be divided in any way among the members of the hero group), the group gets 200 points to spend on its starship. (Of course, one character may buy the ship as a personal possession, letting the other characters come along for the ride.) All further points must be paid for on a one-for-one basis, just like vehicles in ***Champions II***. To buy powers for a ship, use the ***Champions*** rules and give everything bought for the ship a +2 disadvantage (+1 for being a clumsy, obvious, inaccessible focus, and +1 because many of the heroes' powers and abilities are limited while on the ship). Ignore endurance costs and size. Equipment on the ship (such as computers) can be up to 10 times smaller than the current Earth equivalent, at no cost. A power which affects the whole ship must be bought with the Area Effect advantage (except Flight and Armor, which are special cases below). Also, all ship-to-ship weapons must have the advantage "No Range Modifier" (+½), even though the combat system given later calls for range limitations (due to a fiftyfold increase in scale). We have included the point costs in the option lists, after all advantages and disadvantages have been taken into account.

In contrast to the option system, the power point cost of an item usually depends on its combat value, which may be very different from the monetary value. The power points system is useful when the characters come from a highly advanced society, and spend a great deal of time in space. The GM should realize that such characters will need more points than are usually allowed in conventional campaigns. In a futuristic society, a normal person may own a 3D6 Killing blaster, a jacket with 10 resistant ED, a personal jetcar with 50 inches of Flight, a wristwatch communicator, etc. A good method might be to give players the usual number of points to build their character, and 150 points which must be spent on technological items such as spaceships.

Whichever method is used to construct the starship, the players or GM should then draw a ship map. Important ships should be personalized by adding small extra items. Curtains, alien pets, emergency bulkheads, and the ever-popular scantily-clad slave girls make the ship more interesting — and may even be useful someday.

BASIC STARSHIP

Standard equipment includes the following:

A hull which can withstand 10 Gs acceleration (one G = Earth-normal gravity), and which provides 10 BODY and 10 DEF of structural integrity (45 pts.)

Impulse engines capable of generating 5 Gs acceleration (15 pts.) These engines have a dangerous exhaust which does 1D6 Killing energy explosion damage per G of thrust. (For this reason, the cheaper spaceport berths consist of uneven, cratered bedrock.)

One standard warp engine for faster-than-light travel (15 pts.)

Standard landing gear with 3 legs, which can hold the ship upright and stable unless the ground is tilted by more than 30 degrees (0 pts.)

One airlock with a locking door (0 pts.)

A control room with one acceleration couch (1 pt.)

One hex of cargo room (8 cubic meters) (0 pts.)

A small computer, with warp drive programs, technical manuals, and enough extra memory for 10 books' worth of information (2 pts.)

A food and air recirculator, sufficient for two people (10 pts.)

One spacesuit, which can provide air for one person for 2 hours per tank. Two tanks are included (both can be worn at the same time), and tanks may be filled by the air recirculator described above. This suit provides 2 resistant DEF (but 0 BODY) for any character wearing it. (9 pts.)

A simple navigational telescope, connected to the computer. It can also be used for detecting spaceships in combat, but it is not very sensitive, so telescope-aided combat is at −3 OCV. (1 pt.)

A broadcast radio capable of transmitting and receiving all normal communication frequencies (2 pts.)

Total Cost: 100 power points.

The basic starship is as small and light as possible. It is 4 meters in diameter and 5 meters tall, and masses 5 tons. No reputable manufacturer produces a smaller ship. This size assumes futuristic impulse engines, which may use laser beams or fusion or somesuch; a ship using chemical rockets would be much larger. This ship has 10 BODY and 10 DEF, and is therefore dead meat for a ship-to-ship missile, which does 5D6 Killing. This ship has no weapons, but its exhaust may do damage to nearby objects.

OPTIONS

Life is boring on the basic ship, with only 10 recreational books, movies, or records and one tiny room, so almost every ship has a few options. We performed a survey of the ten largest spaceship manufacturing firms, and they offer these options. (GMs: These lists are exemplary, not exhaustive. Add to them as you see fit.)

COMMON OPTIONS

Combat:

Armor: +3 DEF against physical and energy attacks (3 pts. per +1 DEF, 9 pts. min.)

Stronger hull: +5 BODY and +5 Gs maximum thrust. This does not provide additional thrust, it only makes the ship strong enough to withstand 5 Gs more thrust (7 pts., or 3 pts. per 2 BODY)

Force field: Provides +1 DEF for every 1 G diverted from the impulse engines for this purpose. The strength of the shields may be changed each phase. (10 pts.) Each two additional Force Field options (or each additional 20 points) add 1 DEF per G — 2 DEF per G for 30 pts., 3 DEF per G for 50 pts., etc.

Faster impulse engines [Flight]: +5 Gs thrust (15 pts., or 3 pts. per G)

A ship-mounted weapon which does 5D6 Killing damage. Two common choices are:

1) A missile launcher, holding four missiles, which comes with eight spare missiles. It takes one turn to reload a "clip" of four after the first four are fired. These missiles may be fired at a rate of one per phase. The stored missiles are dangerous, and may explode if damaged during combat. (30 pts.)

2) A laser beam, which may be fired each phase, but draws 3 Gs of engine power each phase it is used (30 pts.)

Complete sensor system: Includes infrared, ultraviolet, and radar detectors connected to the ship's computer. Also includes a directional radio transmitter and receiver. All these functions use fragile antennae mounted outside the hull. Without this option, all ship-mounted weapons have a −3 OCV modifier, so any fighting vessel should have it. (8 pts.)

To locate a ship in space, characters must make PER rolls using ship sensors, with a range modifier of 1/5" in combat. Out of combat the range is doubled.

Rooms:

For convenience, assume that each "room" option taken adds 1 meter to any one linear dimension of the ship (length, width, height). Mass increase is left to the GM; one interesting approach is to treat every two or three options as one level of Growth, and figure mass from this. The options:

A bedroom, with living quarters for one person comfortably or two cramped (1 pt.)

A bathroom with zero-g shower (1 pt.)

Increased cargo room: 2x as much cargo room and −1 G thrust. If the thrust falls below 1 G you must buy "Stronger Impulse Engines." (0 pts.)

Concealed cargo room: One hex of room which requires a Concealment roll to find. It may be smaller and better hidden for the same cost: ½ hex gives −2 to others' Concealment rolls, ¼ hex gives −4, etc. (1 pt.)

A sickbay and medical research lab, providing +3 to Paramedic rolls for most known species (2 pts.)

A science lab, providing +3 to one Science (e.g., Physics, Chemistry, Biology, etc.) (2 pts.)

A ship repair room, containing tools and parts needed for minor mechanical, electrical, and engine repairs. Usually any system which has taken more than 2 BODY will require more equipment than this option provides, but the GM may grant an exception ("I need warp speed in three minutes or we all die!") (2 pts.)

A lounge room with a bar, projection TV, comfortable seats, etc. (1 pt.)

A small swimming pool (in a special spherical room, with watertight doors) (1 pt.)

Equipment:

A more powerful computer, with a universal translator program, an autopilot program, and room for 1000 books' worth of information as well as the normal navigational routines. The autopilot has 11− Piloting skill and a DCV of 2 when performing evasive maneuvers. (8 pts.)

A better warp drive: Provides +1 to piloting roll (may only be bought once) (1 pt.)

A warpspace radio, permitting FTL communication with other warpspace radios (2 pts.)

The radio may also be bought as a portable (3" x 3") "bug" to plant on another ship; it functions as a location transmitter, so the ship may be tracked through warp space.

Security systems to prevent intrusion (−3 to intruder's Security Systems roll) (2 pts.)

Less destructive exhaust: does ½ as many dice damage (1 pt.)

Jetpacks for all the spacesuits on your ship (10 inches Flight) (7 pts. per jetpack)

A bigger recirculation system, which doubles the number of people who can live on the ship. Includes acceleration couches and spacesuits for half as many people as can be supported. All brand-name spaceships have a life-support system which can support twice as many people as the ship is designed for (3 pts. to double recirculation system, 9 pts. per spacesuit)

A suspended animation chamber, which can carry ten people in cold sleep (8 pts.) GMs may treat the cold-sleep units as fail-safe no matter how long characters reside in them — after all, it's not fun to just pass away in your sleep — or they may require an activation roll (14– or higher) for revival after extended suspension. Each additional option (or each additional 3 pts.) doubles the capacity of the chamber.

You may buy the same option more than once, unless otherwise indicated. For example, a ship may have more than one laboratory, 16 hexes of cargo room (two options), or a spare computer. In general, combat options improve in linear progression, on a straight one-for-one basis (e.g., buying five "+3 Armor" options gives +15 DEF), while room and equipment options usually increase geometrically (each additional option gets you twice as much as before).

For the discriminating and wealthy voyager, many manufacturers offer luxury starship options. Each luxury option counts as three common options. Here are some of the more popular ones.

LUXURY OPTIONS

(count as three common options)

Combat:

Cloaking device: provides partial invisibility to normal vision, infrared, ultraviolet, and radar for the whole ship. At full power it draws 5 Gs of power and gives the ship +5 DCV, because your ship appears hazy and indistinct to other ships' sensors. The cloaking device may be run at partial power, giving +1 DCV per G. This device must be shut off one turn (12 seconds) before entering warp space, because the cloaking field interferes with the warp field (23 pts.)

Exotic weaponry: Better lasers and missile launchers are available. The missile launchers come with three clips of four missiles each, and the laser draws 5 Gs power each phase it is fired. Missiles can be either 7D6 Killing or 4d6 Killing Armor-Piercing; the same launcher is used for both types of missiles. A laser's damage must be chosen at the time of purchase to be either 7D6K or 4D6K AP at full power. (32 pts. for 4D6KAP, 42 pts. for 7D6K)

Rooms:

Danger room: an extensive, many-person gymnasium, full of exotic equipment (1 pt. per hero using it)

Olympic-size swimming pool, mounted on gimbals (2 pts.)

Equipment:

"Souped-up" warp engines which provide another +1 to piloting roll. This option is only available if you have also bought the common option "high-speed warp engine," and may only be bought once (3 pts.)

Shuttlecraft: An orbit-to-surface vessel designed for four occupants, which can also be used as an emergency lifeboat. It has 4 BODY, 4 DEF, 2 Gs thrust, 10 inches Flight in an atmosphere, landing gear, airlock, a food and air recirculator which can support no more than eight people, control room, small computer, a navigational telescope, and a broadcast radio (46 pts.)

A robot doctor, which regenerates a character's lost BODY pips at the rate of 1 per hour, even if he is below 0 BODY. In ***Danger International*** terms, the robodoc always makes its Paramedic roll. Only one creature may be treated at a time, and the GM may rule that some wounds (such as alien fungi) are beyond the robodoc's programming (14 pts.)

A teleporter capable of transporting six people simultaneously. The range is 30,000 km, which permits transport from an orbiting ship to a planetary surface. The relative acceleration between the ship and the desired destination must not exceed 1 G. When activated, the teleporter drains 5 Gs from the impulse engines for one minute. If the power fails during this time, the characters may be teleported into space, to another dimension, etc. (38 pts.)

An hypnotic sleep-teacher. During the voyage, players may use this unit to spend their experience points on Knowledge or INT-based skills, or to learn foreign languages, at an accelerated rate (5 pts.)

Artificial gravity generator: maintains normal gravity in the living quarters, whether or not the impulse engines are on. This makes it possible to use any number of Gs of thrust without harming the occupants (10 pts.)

Tractor beams: With this option, your ship can tow another ship at a distance up to 1 km. The beam uses power from the impulse engines, and can withstand 1 G for every G diverted from the engines to the tractor beam. This means that a ship can only move at one-third normal speed while towing: one third powers the beam, and the remaining two thirds must move twice the normal mass (15 pts.)

Advanced security systems: These prevent unauthorized entry in a fancy way which you design. A security system has SPD 12, DEX 0, and an attack of up to 50 Active Points (normal, Killing, STUN only, etc). Its activation conditions can include any or all of the following: recognizes voiceprints or faces, can shoot one person selectively within the airlock, can respond to code words with several different systems. For example, a system might be programmed to fill the airlock with 5D6 NND stun gas if it hears "lucky strike," or to lock both airlock doors if it hears a gunshot (5 pts.) Security systems are assumed to work only in standard entryways like airlocks. Systems that work regardless of point or mode of entry cost an additional 5 points.

DISADVANTAGES

Players may increase the number of options (or points) they have to spend on their ship by taking disadvantages. Each disadvantage selected from those below gives the listed number of additional options or points to be spent in improving the ship.

Can't enter atmosphere: The ship can't land on planets; it may only dock at space stations. Players must get to planetary surfaces by other means, such as shuttlecraft or teleporters (1 option or 20 pts.)

14– Activation roll: All weapons, equipment, and engines on the ship have a 14– activation roll. If the roll is failed, characters may just kick it, and try again 1 turn later. If this roll also fails, the equipment must be repaired, taking several hours or days (1 option or decrease all point costs by 20%)

11– Activation roll: 4 options or 40%

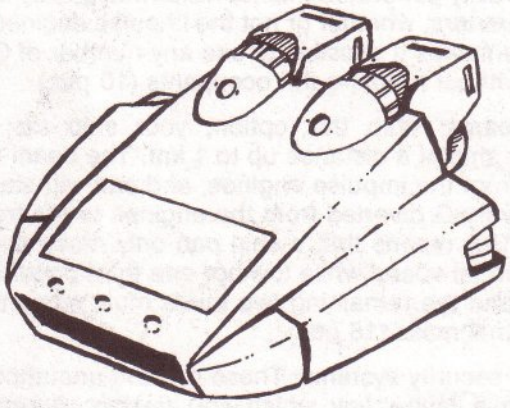
Slow starter: The ship may be difficult to enter, or have engines which need to warm up. The ship must wait 10 minutes before using the impulse or warp engines if they have been shut off (1 option or 7 pts.)

* No life support (and no airlock): The ship cannot provide air or food (1 option or 0 pts.)

* No warp drive: The ship cannot make interstellar flights, unless it spends many years to do so (1 option or 0 pts.)

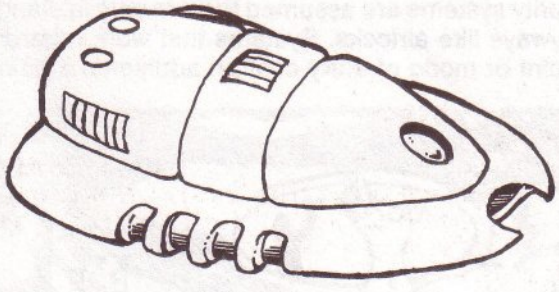
* These disadvantages are not meant for player-characters' ships. They are for robot ships, interplanetary shuttles, etc. They are worth 0 points because in the point system you simply skip buying life support or warp drive, and thus save points.

EXAMPLE STARSHIPS

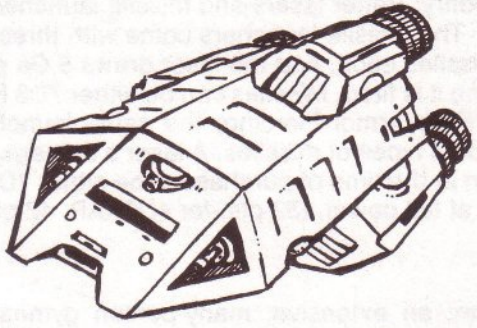


Family Vacation Special: 5 options (112 pts.)
Popular among upper-middle-class executives. Typically has 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, a lounge, and a larger computer. The computer can remember 500 hours of music, Bugs Bunny cartoons, etc. Thrust: 5 Gs.

Asteroid Miner's Ship: 2 options (101 pts.)
This is the cheapest ship anyone even half sane would ride in. Miners usually like a bathroom and a cargo hold. Thrust: 5 Gs.



Pleasure Yacht: 11 options (138 pts.)
Everything on the family vacation special plus faster impulse engines (+5 Gs), better warp drive, 4 hexes of cargo space (1 option and –3 Gs), and a luxury option to impress clients, such as artificial gravity. Thrust: 7 Gs.



Space Pirate's Ship: 23 options (282 pts.)
Armor twice (+6 DEF), faster impulse engines twice (+10 Gs). 5D6K rocket launcher, tractor beam, complete sensor system, 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, 16 hexes cargo room (4 options), ship repair room, better warp drive, bigger recirculation system twice (supports a crew of 4 normally, or 8 in an emergency), 4 spacesuits, and a 7D6K laser cannon (counts as 3 options) to shoot down armored merchants. This ship has a thrust of 9 Gs, because the basic starship starts with 5 Gs, the faster impulse engines add 10 Gs, and the cargo hold subtracts 4 Gs.

Example Ship: The *Wanderer*

An all-female superhero group called the Preservers owns the *Wanderer*. The Preservers are freelance troubleshooters who zoom around the galaxy protecting planets from alien invasion, natural disasters, and interplanetary crime rings. Their favorite type of mission is exploring uncharted worlds and charming (through good deeds) newly-discovered aliens into joining the Federation.

The four members of the Preservers are Atalanta, weapons and martial arts expert; Tasha, mentalist and bureaucrat; Lotus, a scientist, inventor, and energy projector; and finally Mun, an alien who resembles 100 pounds of fur-covered modelling clay.

Here's how the *Wanderer* ship shapes up:

Combat

	Option Cost	Point Cost
Armor (+3 DEF)	1	9
Stronger hull (+5 BODY)	1	7
Laser beam weapon (5d6K, draws 3 Gs)	1	30
Complete sensor system	1	8
Faster impulse engines (+5 Gs)	1	15

Rooms

Danger Room	3	4
4 Bedrooms	3	3
Xenobiology lab	1	2
Sickbay	1	2
Lounge	1	1
Control room	0	1
2 Bathrooms	2	2
Concealed cargo room (½ hex)	1	1

Equipment

Larger computer	1	8
Recirculation system (max. 8 people)	2	6
4 Spacesuits	included above	36
4 jetpacks for the spacesuits	1	28
Tractor beams	3	15
Warpspace radio	1	2
Better warp drive (+1 to Piloting)	1	1
Teleporter	3	28
Total:	30	220

Disadvantages

Can't enter atmosphere	+1	+20

DEF: 13
BODY: 15
Maximum Gs: 10

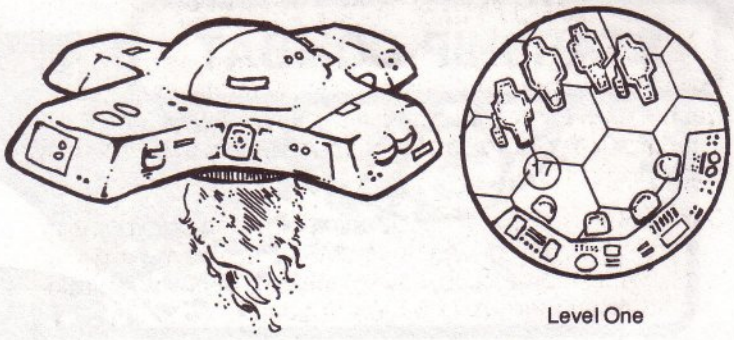
The Preservers pay 10 points and get 200 points to spend on their ship. Their ship cannot enter the atmosphere so they get 20 more points. The point totals balance.

The ship has a robot butler named Jeeves. Jeeves is intelligent enough to deliver messages and prepare food, but he cannot operate the ship's engines or weapons. His torso contains a small stereo system, which plays relaxing jazz music. Jeeves is not paid for with points or options, but is considered an NPC.

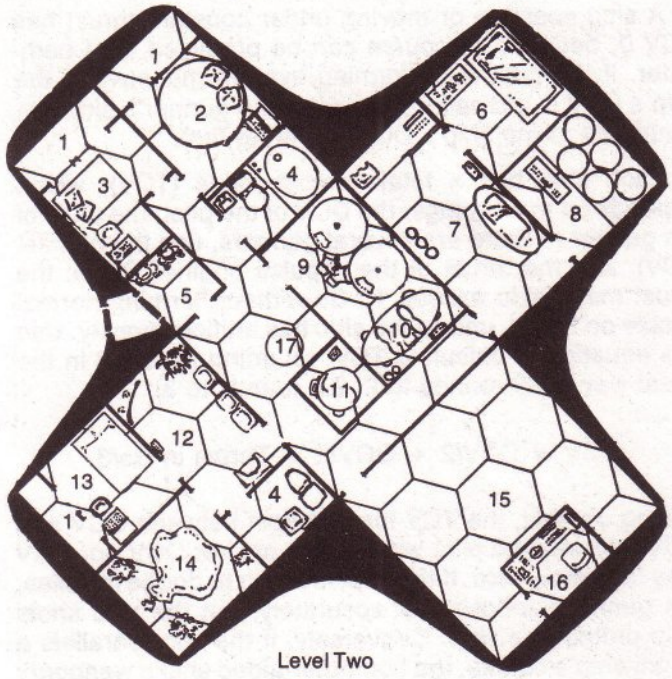
Map Description:

Level one: The control room

The control room contains four acceleration couches. Next to two of the couches are control boxes which drive the ship, fire the lasers, and activate the tractor beams. These boxes are used



Level One



Level Two

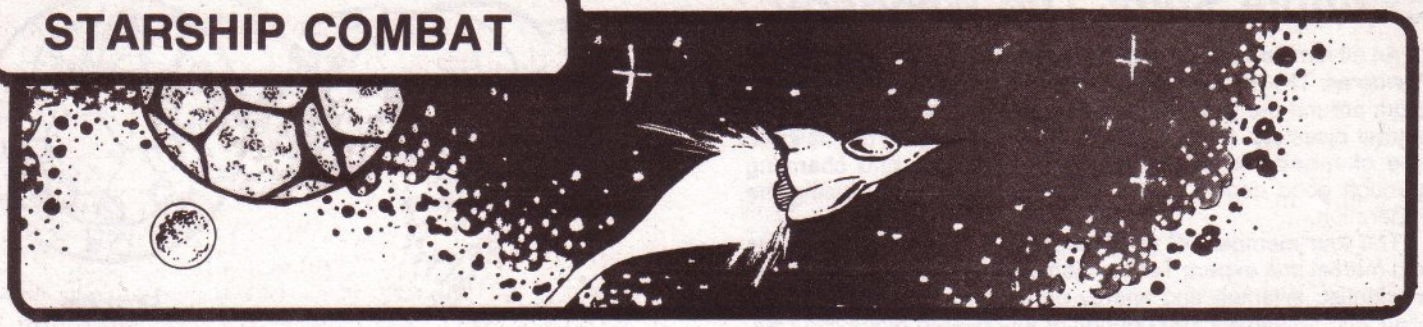
when the ship is under high acceleration. The master control panel contains the sensors, laser gun control, warpspace radio, autopilot, ship engine controls, and tractor beam controls.

The laser gun (not pictured) is mounted on the outside of the control room dome. The tractor beams (also not pictured) are located on the underside of the ship, far away from the exhaust.

Level two

1. Storage. The space suits and jetpacks are located in the cabinet next to the airlock.
2. Tasha's bedroom
3. Lotus' bedroom
4. Powder room
5. Airlock
6. Sickbay
7. Xenobiology laboratory
8. Teleporter room
9. Impulse engines. The impulse engines consist of microorganisms in a liquid tank. These organisms emit light that is reflected into a laser propulsion drive. The smaller tank is for emergency back-up power.
10. Warp engine
11. Recirculation system
12. Lounge. The lounge contains a food processor, a stereo, a bar, and a projection TV.
13. Atalanta's bedroom
14. Mun's bedroom. This room contains plants and a one-foot-deep pond, which is Mun's "bed." The pond can be emptied (by remote control, if necessary) when the ship stops accelerating, so the water doesn't splash around in free fall.
15. Danger room
16. Danger room control booth
17. Hatch. This hatch has a ladder leading to the control room.

STARSHIP COMBAT



A ship coasting or moving under constant thrust has DCV 0, because its course can be predicted by a computer. If the pilot is performing evasive maneuvers, the ship's DCV is increased. Likewise, the gunner's skill can contribute to the ship's DCV (covering fire).

Each ship has a total combat value (TCV), which depends on three things: the DCV of the pilot, the OCV of the gunner (if there are several gunners, use the highest OCV), and the thrust of the impulse engines. Note: the thrust may never exceed 10 Gs without harming normal people on board, unless the ship has artificial gravity. Use this equation to calculate TCV, rounding fractions in the usual way (2.33 rounds to 2, 2.5 rounds to 3):

TCV = DCV/2 + OCV/2 + Thrust in Gs/3

During combat, the TCV may be split between OCV and DCV any way the pilot wishes, but neither OCV nor DCV may fall below zero. If the pilot is trying to dodge missiles, the gunner cannot shoot accurately, but the wild shots help protect the ship. Conversely, if the pilot parallels a target ship's course, the computer-aided ship's weaponry gives the gunner a very high OCV. The pilot must declare the ship's OCV and DCV on each of his or her phases. The ship's OCV and DCV stay the same until the pilot's next phase. The pilot may abort his or her next phase to increase the ship's DCV to maximum; this reduces the OCV to 0.

For example, suppose a pilot with DCV 5 and a gunner with OCV 6 are using the pirate ship described above, which has 9 Gs thrust. This ship has a TCV of 9. If attacking a weak opponent, the pilot will choose DCV 0 and OCV 9, but if he is outnumbered and outgunned, he will flee for his life at DCV 9 and OCV 0. In normal combat, he will probably use OCV 5 and DCV 4.

USE OF OPTIONS IN COMBAT

All OCV and DCV modifiers caused by options add directly to OCV or DCV each phase. They do *not* add to TCV. For example, a ship with a working cloaking device may never fall below DCV 5, because the +5 is added after TCV allocation.

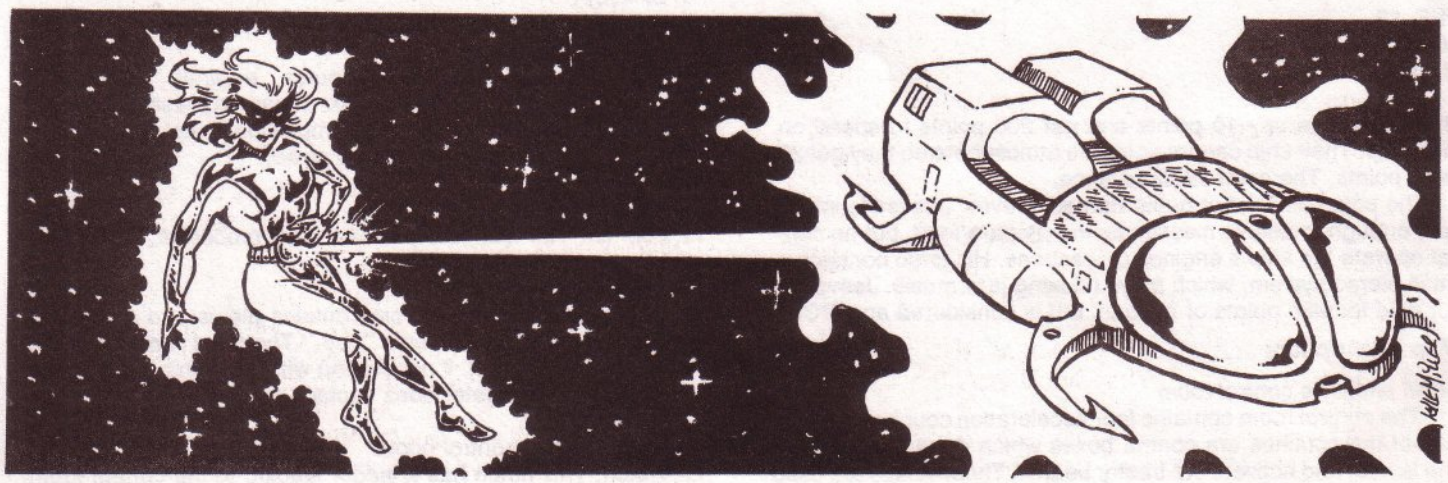
Tractor Beams: In combat, a ship may slow down another ship by using tractor beams. The attacking ship must make a normal attack roll, and have at least as many Gs diverted to its tractor beams as the defending ship is using for thrust. Two ships linked by tractor beams both have DCV 0, and may fire at each other with the gunner's full OCV. However, they're both sitting ducks if another ship shoots them!

SOLITARY PILOTS

A single pilot can still fight from his or her ship, in at least two ways. If the ship has an autopilot (part of the "larger computer" option), the pilot can let the computer do the driving (DCV 2) while he or she fires the weapons. The TCV is figured using DCV 2, the pilot's OCV, and the ship's Gs. If the ship has no autopilot, the pilot has two choices: the TCV is computed from his DCV, zero OCV, and the ship's Gs, or from zero DCV, his OCV, and the ship's Gs. Once the TCV is determined, he divides it between OCV and DCV just like any other ship.

DANGERS TO OCCUPANTS

Characters inside a room which is hit may take damage from flying shrapnel. Each player rolls 3D6 and is hit on 10–. Shrapnel does 1D6 Killing, just like a bullet.



Characters may take up to their CON in Gs without harm. If G forces exceed a character's CON, the character takes 1D6 normal damage per phase for every G over CON. If the ship has artificial gravity, characters do not suffer G effects.

Spacesuits provide 2 resistant DEF to the character wearing them. However, each time an attack does BODY, it causes a leak. An airtight spacesuit provides 2 hours of air, with a full tank. Leaky spacesuits use up air faster, as shown on this chart.

Number of Leaks	One Tank of Air Lasts:
0	2 hours
1	1 minute
2	1 turn

If a spacesuit takes 3 or more punctures, it will not provide any life support until repaired.

Whenever the ship takes damage which exceeds its DEF, it will start to leak air. An attack which does only 1 or 2 BODY will produce a slow leak, which will take 2 turns (24 seconds) to evacuate a room. If it does more than 2 BODY, the room will be in vacuum after one segment. Adjoining rooms and hallways may also lose air, at a rate determined by the GM. (Normal ships will hold air for several hours.) Characters in vacuum take 2D6 NND STUN each phase. Once a player falls unconscious, he or she takes 2D6 STUN and BODY each turn, after segment 12. Experienced warriors always wear spacesuits and pump the ship's air into tanks before combat begins; this usually takes two full turns.

HIT LOCATION CHART FOR SPACESHIPS

3D6 Roll	Location	BODY X	OCV Mod
3-5	Sensors	0	–8
6	Control Room	X2	–7
7	Weapons	X½	–7
8-9	Other Rooms	X1	–5
10	Equipment	X1	–6
11-12	Impulse Engines	X1	–4
13-14	Warp Drive	X1	–6
15-18	Landing Gear	X½	–7

If this chart indicates a location not present on a given ship, roll again. For example, a miner's ship doesn't have any other rooms or weapons. For very large ships, such as huge cargo vessels, the GM may want to modify this chart, perhaps increasing the chance to hit other rooms. OCV modifiers are applied *after* TCV is allocated.

HIT LOCATION EFFECTS

Sensors: A hit here does no BODY to the ship, but may destroy the antennae for the complete sensor system. Antennae have no DEF and 5 BODY, and operate at full performance until they reach 0 BODY. If a ship's antennae are destroyed, the sensor system is useless and only the navigational telescope is left. All attacks made using the telescope take a –3 OCV modifier, after TCV is allocated.

Control Room: Damage which penetrates the ship's armor counts double here, because these systems are very delicate. Furthermore, each time the control room is damaged, roll 1D6 on the following table:

1 Lose all communications
2 Lose tactical computer: –5 OCV
3 Lose starmaps: now all warp travel is through unmapped space
4 Lose all library information
5 Engines stay on at full thrust for 2D6 segments, in a straight line. The ship is DCV 0 during this time.
6 All weapons fire at random 1D3 times (OCV 0), at a rate of 1 shot per segment.

If one hit to the control room does most of the ship's BODY, the GM may rule that the player should roll several times on the table. If all the ship's BODY is lost in one hit, the control room may be totally destroyed.

Weapons: If a ship has more than one weapon, choose among them by a dice roll. If any BODY is done to missile launchers, they may explode. On a roll of 1 on 1D6, any remaining missiles will explode. They do their normal damage, but the ship gets only half its normal defense. If missile launchers take any BODY, they are unsafe to use. If they are used anyway, the GM should give them a chance of exploding in the tube, 8– or 11–, depending on the damage done. If they explode, they do their full damage on the ship firing them, and may cause remaining ammunition to explode. Laser weapons are safe but delicate; they never explode, but stop working on 14– if they take any BODY.

Other Rooms: If there are several rooms other than the control room, choose among them by a dice roll.

Equipment: One item of the ship's equipment will stop working. Every ship has a life support system, and may have other equipment such as cloaking device, escape shuttle, robot doctor, teleporter, artificial gravity generator, or tractor beams. Choose among these randomly.

Impulse Engines: Damaged engines may still be used, but lose 1 G of thrust for each 1 BODY taken. When the thrust falls to 1 G, the ship may no longer land on Earth-like planets. When the thrust falls to 0 Gs, the impulse engines are useless.

Warp Drive: Damaged warp drives may still be used, but take –1 to the piloting roll for every 1 BODY taken. Desperate players may still use the warp drive with an increased chance of getting lost in space, until the ship's total BODY reaches 0 (see below).

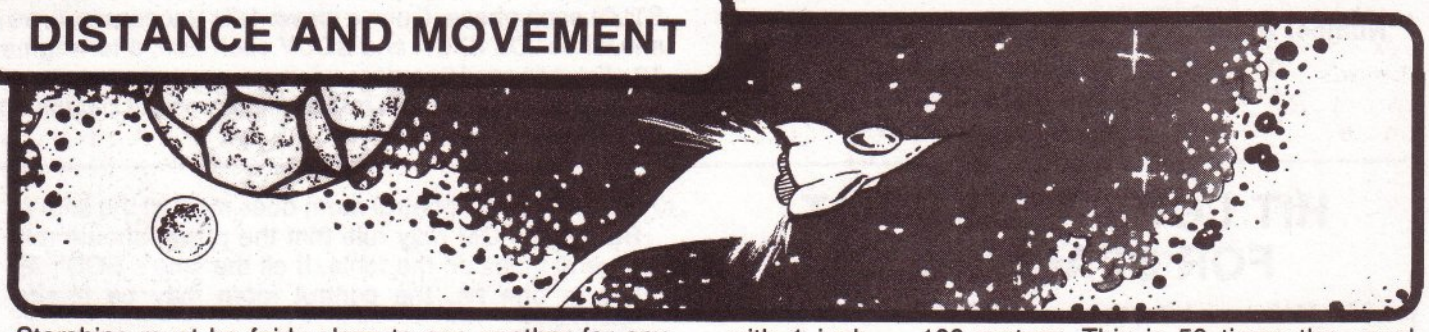
Landing Gear: A ship which has lost 1-4 BODY in the landing gear can only land safely on a roll of 11–. If it has lost 5 or more BODY, the ship can only land safely on a roll of 8–. Piloting skill levels may be applied to this roll, but if it fails the ship will tip over and take 2D6 to 4D6 Killing to a random location, depending on what it lands on.

REACHING ZERO BODY

Once a ship reaches 0 BODY, it cannot maneuver or land and provides no life support. Even if the engines are not damaged, the ship is no longer sturdy enough to withstand any thrust. The GM may rule that the ship has broken into pieces.

Example: Tegan is in his yacht's control room when an unkind bounty hunter attacks him, hitting his control room. His ship has 10 DEF and 10 BODY and the missile does 16 BODY. Tegan's ship has 4 BODY left, and the control room is in vacuum. First he checks for shrapnel; he rolls a 9 and is hit by 1D6 Killing. He takes 3 BODY and 9 STUN, which does not disable him. Then he rolls a 3 for malfunction: his starmaps are erased. Uttering an unprintable curse, he turns on the ship's force field and runs to get a spacesuit.

DISTANCE AND MOVEMENT



Starships must be fairly close to one another for any combat to take place. However, realistic space movement is quite complex. Therefore, we provide two systems.

Abstract Movement: Ships are either "in range" (less than 500 meters) or "out of range." Two ships which are "in range" may fire at each other according to the rules above, and ships "out of range" may not fire at each other. Exceptions may be made for special attacks, such as shooting at an unsuspecting target.

When ships detect each other in space, the GM rules whether they begin the encounter in range or out of range. (Usually they'll be right on the borderline, 500 meters apart.) Thereafter, movement relative to the opposing ship is handled by a series of Combat Vehicle Operations rolls. Each pilot rolls 3D6 against his or her CVO skill (8 – if the pilot doesn't have CVO) during phase 12 of each turn; there is an improvement to the skill roll of +1 per G of engine thrust (use the maximum thrust reached that turn). The pilot who makes his or her skill roll by the greater amount may decide whether to "close with" or "run from" the opposing ship(s). Tied or failed rolls indicate the ships maintain distance.

For the purposes of this abstract movement system, assume that three successful "closings" will bring two ships from "borderline" range into point-blank range (+1 OCV); thereafter, successful CVO rolls by the pursuing pilot indicate he or she is flying rings around the opponent (+1 DCV for pursuer). Three successful "running" rolls will take the opponent out of combat range; one more successful roll takes the fleeing ship so far away it can escape from enemy sensors and evade detection. Each successful "closing" roll can be neutralized on a subsequent turn by the opponent's successful "running" roll, and vice versa — so combat becomes a tug-of-war of CVO rolls.

For encounters involving multiple ships, assume that a pilot who rolls successfully against CVO may close with or flee from any pilots who made their rolls by lesser amounts (or failed the roll altogether).

A map may be used with this system, but it serves only for color and does not affect play.

Mapped Movement: Use normal one-inch hex paper, with 1 inch = 100 meters. This is 50 times the usual ***Champions*** scale. A ship moves a number of inches equal to the number of Gs it is using for thrust, each four segments. For example, a ship with 3 Gs will move 3 hexes on segments 4, 8, and 12. All movement is two-dimensional.

All attacks take a range modifier of 1/3". Optionally, GMs with the third edition of ***Champions*** may wish to give especially large or small ships Range Modifier Multiples or halvings (as described under Growth and Shrinking). A single halving or a multiple of x2 to x4 should be appropriate for most ships of unusual size; though these are much larger vehicles than heroes ordinarily encounter, the large size of the target is counterbalanced by the increased distance from an attacker.

Turning radius presents a problem. For a fast, simple system, just let the players move 1 inch per G through any sequence of contiguous hexes (unlimited cornering). For a more realistic and complicated system, use these "cornering" rules.

Cornering: A spaceship always faces toward a hexside. A change in its facing (direction of movement) by 60 degrees (to the next hexside) is called a "corner." These three rules limit cornering.

1. Every corner must be preceded by at least one inch of forward movement. This means that a ship may never turn around "in place." The tightest circle possible circles one hex.

2. During each turn (12 seconds) the total number of corners may not exceed *half* the maximum Gs it used during any phase of that turn. Fractions round up. For example, a ship moving at 1 G can only make one corner every 12 seconds, but a ship moving at 6 Gs can make 3 corners in 12 seconds. (If this seems strange, remember that Gs represent *acceleration*, not *velocity*. In space, any change of direction requires thrust; the more Gs you use to thrust, the more maneuverable your ship becomes.)

3. Keep a running total of the corners made each turn. After segment 12, restart this total at 0. If the number of Gs used is ever *less than twice* this total, no corners may be made that segment. This is the same thing as saying that corners may not be "reserved" from phase to phase. For example, a ship used 8 Gs on segment 4, and makes 3 corners. If this ship wants to make another corner on

segment 8, it must use at least 7 Gs that phase.

Example: Tegan wants to turn around to escape a pirate ship, dead ahead. On segment 4 he uses 7 Gs of thrust (the maximum available on his ship), and makes a tight circle to reverse his direction. This requires 3 corners. On segment 8 he continues to use 7 Gs, and makes one more corner. Now he has used up all his corners. He must move in a straight line until after segment 12.

Example: Tegan sees a wrecked ship ahead. On segment 4 he uses 4 Gs and makes two corners to get into its hex. Suddenly he detects an attacking ship coming towards him! He wants to reverse his direction, but he cannot. The best he can do is to use all of his 7 Gs on phase 8, which gives him 2 more corners to use this turn.

STARSHIP PILOTING REVISITED

Characters with this Transport skill can take off in and land starships, and perform FTL travel as described in our previous article (*SG* 73). If they want to land a damaged ship, or perform a difficult maneuver, they must make a Combat Vehicle Operations roll (8– if the pilot doesn't have CVO). Skill levels in Starship Piloting do not apply to this roll, but only to travel through warp space.

Cost: 2 points, +1 to warp travel roll for each +1 point.

Also, the GM should restrict the number of skill levels a starship pilot may have. Since every level doubles the safe speed of warp travel, more than 1 or 2 levels is unheard of.

USE OF POWERS

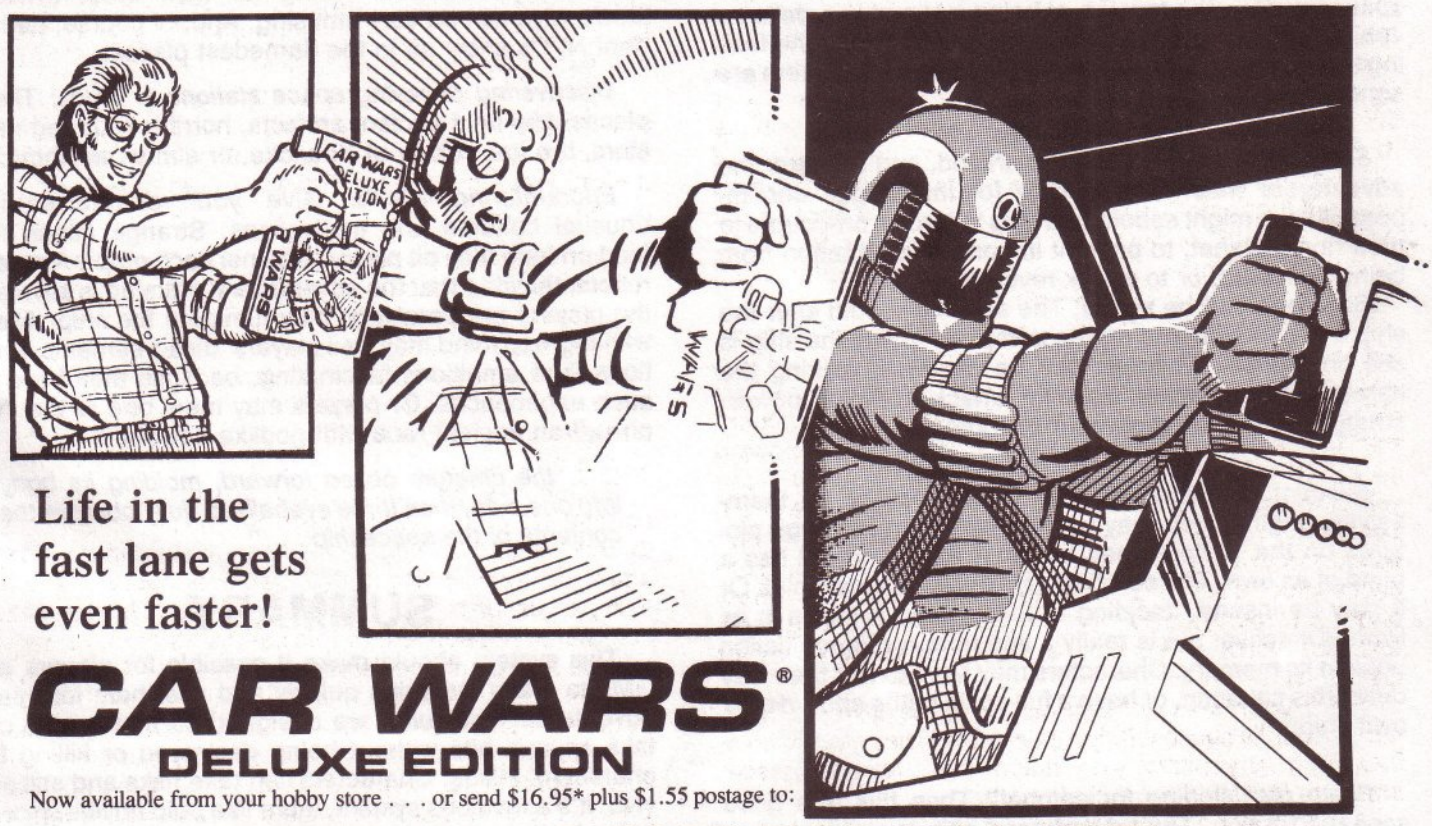
Superheroes' powers are limited on a spaceship. Characters cannot Energy-Blast enemies through the ship's walls — and they can't roll down the windows, either. Invisibility, Shrinking, Entangle, and all movement powers will be nearly useless while on a ship. Some powers may be useful in ship-to-ship combat, such as light-based ranged attacks (which can pass through a porthole) or mental powers. Usually starships are 500 tactical hexes apart, so these powers will be useless unless they have no range modifier. These attacks are treated like any other, with the same hit location table.

If a character can fly over to an enemy ship and climb around on its surface, he or she can attack any component of the ship without any OCV modifiers for a called shot. Thus, relatively weak attacks can still affect a ship by destroying its weapons, control room, or sensors. However, it takes a lot of strength to hold on: if the ship is using 5 Gs, you must have enough strength to hold 5 times your own weight.

Superheroes with Flight and Life Support are a special case. They do not have a TCV, but fight with their usual OCV and DCV. To decide whether the ship can escape from a superhero (or vice versa), determine the number of Gs the superhero has (1 G per 5" Flight) and compare that with the number of Gs the ship has.

RESOLVING COMBAT

Once combat starts, there are only three ways for it to



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end. First, one or both combatants may decide to stop fighting, due to damage suffered or some other reason.

Second, one ship may jump to warp space. Jumps during combat take a −2 piloting modifier, as well as any other modifiers which apply (such as damage to the warp drive). Combat is impossible in warp space, and following another ship through warp space is also impossible unless the ships are communicating by warp space radio. (Sometimes players or NPCs may build a "bug" to follow hostile ships.)

Third, one ship may escape by using impulse engines. If you are using the abstract movement system, the fleeing ship must get to "borderline" range and then make one more successful "running" roll after that. Using mapped movement, the ship must get outside sensor range of its pursuer.

ADVENTURES IN SPACE

Characters may spend a great deal of time on a ship. Don't make your spaceship an interplanetary station wagon. The warp drive is already unpredictable and dangerous (see previous article). The spaceship should also be mysterious. Give the players a ship with a sentient computer, a box that the players can't open (but occasionally things crawl out of it), and a couple of unexplained buttons under the control panel. Perhaps the last owner was a smuggler, or worse . . .

Space doesn't have to be barren. The planetary systems the players pass through should be littered with decaying hulks of huge starships, pirates, and powerful ancient devices. This gives players the atmosphere of space travel — the tension of being trapped in a delicate vehicle that is the only source of life support, and the feeling that space is infinite with infinite possibilities. Here are some possible adventures:

Sabotage: The starmaps are erased, and in horror the adventurers watch the vaccine for the plague decompose. Aliens might sabotage a ship to force it off-course to their home planet, to prevent important information from being delivered, or to wreak revenge.

Sabotage can be subtle. The saboteur could alter the ship's destination and rig the computer to say the ship is still on course. Weapons can be disabled, making the heroes' ship a sitting duck for attack. Political power-struggles are good motives for sabotage.

Sentient computer system: Doors locking by themselves, engines not obeying commands and strange pictures on the video screen hint that the computer has a mind of its own. The computer may be like a lost child. Or it may be insane, deciding to follow what it thinks is its Prime Directive, but is really a line from a science fiction book in its memory. Characters may have to talk their way out of this situation, or have a full-scale battle aboard their own ship.

Pirate raid: Itching for combat? Then this is a good scenario for you. The adventurers' ship is suddenly surrounded by several ships with thick hulls and many panels which slide away to reveal the muzzles of cannons. Fighting ensues, and when the ship is too damaged to move, the pirates will board it, and combat moves into the ship's corridors.

Diseases on board ship: Diseases may cause ***JI*** heroes to turn into plants, or ***Danger International*** characters to hallucinate and betray their friends. Characters may become disembodied minds, or split into duplicates. Superheroes could find their powers suddenly gone, or changed.

Stowaways: The players didn't realize there was a door hidden behind the storage cabinet. Stowaways could be the cause of murder or sabotage, or they might be friendly creatures fleeing for their lives. Invisible stowaways can be very amusing. And, of course, dependent NPCs show up in the darnedest places.

Discovering decaying space stations or ships: These places may hold ancient artifacts, horrible mutated monsters, the lost colony of Roanoke, or almost anything.

Encountering aliens: Give your extraterrestrials unusual cultures and motivations. Strange aliens that feed on hate may pit players against each other. A race of robots, thinking that the adventurers' starship is alive and the players are parasites, may fumigate the ship. Aliens with a group mind may find players' disagreements, emotions, and ambitions fascinating, because they have no such experiences. Or players may meet one of the "old ones," an ancient race with godlike powers.

". . . the creature oozed forward, molding its body into one, two, then three eyeballs to dully observe the contents of the spaceship . . ."

SUMMARY

This system should make it possible for players and GMs to make starships quickly and use them for space adventures. The rules are designed so that a ship can take several hits without being destroyed or killing the characters inside. Characters can take risks and still survive. It's a frivolous system, more like pulp novels or comic books than realistic science fiction. Happy voyaging!

Many thanks to Steve Wilson, Larry Newman, and Ethan Strauss for their many good ideas. We also thank our playtesters, James Johnson and Robert Miles. □

KEEPING POSTED

Featured Review

DUELMASTERS™

by Reg Reid

The spectacle of combat in the arena as an eye-catching, dramatic display of two warriors' skills has been a staple of public entertainment for thousands of years. For some primordial, subconscious reason, people seem to enjoy watching a sweating, sinewy, snarling combatant flail away at some equally appealing foe, in the hope that superior intelligence and training will preserve life and limb long enough to bring glory to his name, the name of his team, his tribe, race, nation, sovereign, or whatever.

We are all aware, for example, that most of those historic Roman gladiators were prisoners of war, slaves, or criminals condemned to fight in the arena. Surprisingly enough, not only did some freemen fight for money and fame, but even women occasionally fought. Success in the arena often meant instant fame in Rome, and it was common practice for a wealthy "team manager" to feed and train his "stable" of warriors, house them in barracks, and give them the best medical care available at the time. Most of the contests were held during funerals or special celebrations, and came under state control. At least one Roman emperor, Commodus by name, didn't feel it beneath him to don buckler, shield, and helmet, and occasionally fight in the arena himself.

These battles were justified by the rulers of that time as hardening the average Roman citizen to the sight of bloodshed, thus preparing the person for the rigors of warfare. No one ever denied, though, that the games were basically exciting and entertaining, even instructive to the would-be soldier.

Nowadays, of course, people consider themselves much too "civilized" to employ such cruel and bloody spectacles as entertainment. Human nature being what it is, however, millions of people still thrill to the vicarious "hack-and-slash" fare served up continuously on television and at the movies. Swordplay, the martial arts, "ninja" combat, and the like have grossed a fortune at the box office. And in the real world of the twentieth century, are the prize-fighters of the boxing ring (arena) considered any less heroic for their ability to inflict injury on their opponent? As a measure of public satisfaction with this form of "combat," we need only to cite the last major heavyweight championship, when millions of dollars changed hands. Pugilism, as entertainment, is certainly not on the endangered species list. Perhaps, as Paul Simon wrote: "After changes upon changes, we are more or less the same."

Which brings us to our game review.

Our Game Review

Reality Simulations, Inc., of Tempe, AZ, has introduced ***Duelmasters*** into the marketplace. A computer-moderated, open-ended, straightforward PBM game in narrative form, ***Duelmasters*** is a stylized game of arena combat between gladiators. The player acts as "team manager" to a stable of five warriors. The challenge is to develop these warriors, cover their weaknesses, enhance their strengths, and eventually to work up to the top of the team rankings.

The player designs each individual fighter by allocating 84 attribute points among seven characteristics: strength, constitution, size, wit, will, speed, and deftness. There are also ten different fighting styles to choose from; once chosen, a given warrior's style is permanent. Opportunities are provided for a gladiator to learn additional fighting styles after he is rated expert in his current style.

Armor, weapons, and helm are available to each new warrior as he is sent into battle. A generous choice is presented, taken from many periods in history. Dagger, quarterstaff, and short-swords date from antiquity. From ancient Rome, we see the inclusion of the helmet, small round shield (buckler), and the scimitar. (Curiously, the most popular Roman offensive and defensive weapons, the trident and net, are absent from the list.) Mace, longsword, halberd, maul, and mailed armor date from the Middle Ages, and steel swords, as the epee, from the sixteenth century. In all, there are sixteen single-handed weapons, six two-handed weapons, and eleven types of armor on the list. A weapon's weight and encumbrance value must be taken into account when matching it to the size and strength of one's warrior. Consideration must also be made of a weapon's effectiveness against certain types of armor and certain fighting styles.

Each warrior has a popularity factor ranging from 1 to 99. Fast, exciting warriors tend to rack up popularity points quickly, as do winning warriors. Clumsiness, stupidity, and hesitancy in combat detract from one's popularity. While popularity factors are entertaining for the player and add flavor to the content of the newsletter that is sent out each turn, the fact remains that actually winning the duel is the only thing that allows one's team to climb to the top of the rankings. Fighters are not penalized for killing their opponents; nevertheless, death in the standard arena is fairly uncommon. This presumably reflects the presence of a benevolent referee.

Action in the arena is continuous, and a copious computer printout reports blow-by-blow activity in one-minute segments. A particularly protracted duel can consist of hundreds of lines of narrative and several feet of paper. On the other hand, life can also be nasty, brutish, and short. Strategy for each warrior must be selected in advance for the entire length of the contest, special provisions being given for a warrior who survives the sixth minute, or who is becoming desperate due to wounds or exhaustion. On each warrior's card, the player must indicate, on a scale of 1 to 10, his warrior's offensive effort, activity level, and kill desire for that round. Also, the player may select specific bodily locations for attack and protection, special offensive and defensive tactics, and foe selection or avoidance. Special rules may be followed to challenge a foe, to make a "blood-feud" challenge against a warrior who has slain a team member, or to avoid a team one may not wish to fight. After the computer determines all challenge or avoid commands, the remaining fighters are randomly paired.

Some crucial tips on warrior strategy were brought to my attention by Jeff Morgan, company manager at Reality Simulations. The prevailing philosophy seems to be that half the fun of this game is learning the various interrelationships that can exist among the choices that one is given for one's warrior. Virtually all warrior activities in ***Duelmasters*** are determined by the interaction of not fewer than two attributes, and often by several. Attribute increases can be made (if you choose) by training your warriors for those particular attributes instead of opting for skill development.

How does a warrior learn skills? The factors involved are rather sophisticated and are interrelated in a complex way, but two primary attributes predominate: wit (ability to learn), and will (determination to learn). Other factors, if present, may result in hindering a warrior's chances to learn: damage taken during a fight, losing a fight, being in a fight which is too short in duration or not close enough for a frequent exchange of blows, or fighting warriors less experienced than your own may all be counterproductive activities where skill is concerned.

Warriors who are persistently incompetent, incorrigible, or just tiresome may be sent by the player to the "dark arena," to do battle with beasts and human monstrosities. Few survive the experience.

Turn Report Package

The printout is a detailed, blow-by-blow narrative of all actions taken by fighters during the turn. In addition, Reality Simulations includes a notification if any warrior has received an expert rating in a particular fighting skill, or a replacement roll-up character card (no extra charge) to replace a warrior slain in the arena. Also included with each turn, at no extra cost, is a highly entertaining newsletter with such features as "Team Spotlight," which discusses the origin and development of a particular team, and "Spy Report," by Boswall the roving spymaster (who, with his mixture of rumor and report, innuendo and humor, is the Rona Barrett of the ancient world). "Personal Ads," another free service to the client, allows players to publicly boast, challenge, insult, make witty comments, and generally sound off in any way they please to past and future opponents.

"Ed's Ramblings," from Ed Schoonover, game designer, allows the player to glimpse some of the inner workings of what would otherwise be nothing but inscrutable and complex equations lurking deep in the subroutines of some computer program. Ed discusses fighting styles, weapon design, training styles and traditions in the education of ancient warriors, and generally gives hints, tips, and admonitions for good play and for the appreciation of the game. Team rankings are given each turn; wins, losses, and kills are documented and percentages computed. Individual warriors are also ranked, and the outcomes of individual battles are listed. Furthermore, "Battle Report" clues players to the most popular and successful fighting styles used during the turn.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Duelmasters is a flexible game. A player may send any number of his warriors into the arena each turn, or may elect to stand idle for the turn, with no ensuing penalty. Ambitious players may send men into more than one arena, if desired, and if expenses allow. Considering that there is no set-up fee, no hidden or additional fees, free replacement of dead warriors, and a free newsletter each turn, I can attest to the fact that this game is easy on the wallet. In addition, I personally found the answers to my questions to be courteous and thorough, an important service in any PBM game.

The rulebook is brief but comprehensive, and attractively bound; it leaves very little to be desired.

The game is easy to learn, and the turn forms can be filled out in minutes once one is familiar with the rules. For further convenience, a list of shorthand codes has been provided, but their use is not obligatory.

Some players have complained about the wait between turns, but I have it on good authority that new programming changes will soon result in faster turnaround times, as well as in more vivid narratives. Earlier printouts reveal minor typographical errors, and occasional redundancy. From time to time, the flow of action seems a little awkward, and I was perplexed on a few occasions by a puzzling inability to correlate the orders I had given with my warriors' activities with his weapons. For example, I noticed that one fellow was stopping every few seconds to "conserve his strength," despite the fact that I had ordered a high level of activity for that particular round.

Another player I spoke with expressed a desire to be able to select his foes a little more discriminately. In particular, he thought that his nimble, highly-trained, parry-riposte swordsman should not have been pitted against a hulking brute with a mace. The mismatched pairing of styles and weapons, he declared, was ludicrous, and the outcome unfair.

If I were to make any specific changes, I would ask for more explicitness on the nature and extent of injuries sustained by the men, as well as some sort of indication (possibly numerical) of the current overall status of the fighter at the end of each round, and perhaps a bit more documentation on exactly what is pleasing (or displeasing) to the audience. And if warriors can be rated on the basis of popularity, perhaps teams should be so rated as well.

Some of the suggested changes would result in additional complexity. And, of course, it's entirely possible that many players enroll in *Duelmasters* for precisely the reason that they *don't* want to spend a lot of time trying to fathom a more complex game. To paraphrase Shakespeare: "One man's lust is another man's disgust."

In summary, I would say that this game shows promise and is a good value for the money. For those whose tastes run to one-on-one combat and to narrative exposition, I would suggest that it be given a try.

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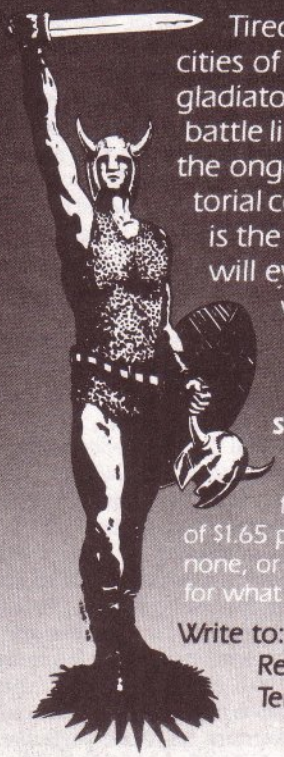

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KEEPING POSTED

Rick Loomis on Play-By-Mail

(Rick Loomis is the founder and president of Flying Buffalo, Inc. He is generally recognized as the founder of the PBM industry, and remains a leading figure in it — as witness the recent formation of the Play By Mail Association, in which Loomis played a key role. We asked him to comment on the industry, the Association, and the future.

—The Editors)

I used to write this really successful column for *Gaming Universal*. (I call it a really successful column because Bob McLain used to pay me $100 for each column!) Unfortunately, *Gaming Universal* has gone the way of most gaming magazines (probably partly because McLain paid his writers a decent amount of money for their work). I don't expect to get anywhere near that amount from Steve Jackson, but when his editor called me and asked if I'd like to write an article, I said "sure!" I'd like to get up on my soapbox and say something to some people besides those who subscribe to my own magazine.

Birth

I was asked to write something on the birth of PBM and how it has developed since. I always consider the "Birth of PBM" to be January 1970, when I first started to advertise for players for my ***Nuclear Destruction*** game. People had been playing games by mail for many years, of course, but I think that was the first time anyone advertised for customers, rather than just playing a game among friends. ***Nuclear Destruction*** was loosely based on the ***Nuclear War*** card game invented by Doug Malewicki. I put ads for my game in *The General*, and wrote to other people who advertised there, asking them if they wanted to try my game. ***Nuclear Destruction*** was a lot like play-by-mail ***Diplomacy*** in many ways. There were several players, a moderator or referee, lots of "press" (public statements by the players), and a lot of diplomacy. The main difference was hidden information: no one got the entire result of each turn. Instead, each player got information about his current position according to what move he made.

Unfortunately, one of the similarities to the PBM ***Diplomacy*** of the day was that I wasn't charging much money for my services. At first I only asked for return postage. After awhile I raised that to 25 cents per turn. When I first started to run ***Starweb*** games, I wondered how many people would be willing to pay a whole dollar for each turn! It is very east to assume that the "cost" of a PBM game is primarily the cost of the postage stamp to mail it. (Especially the computer-run games where "the computer does all the work.") As the games got more popular, and I got more customers, I had to hire employees, rent office space, pay payroll taxes, and so forth. New customers were pouring in, and old customers were signing up for more and more games. Soon we were weeks behind in processing the game turns, and sometimes it would be months before we could start a new game for a new customer. But all the money was being spent on current expenses, and we couldn't afford to hire more people or buy another computer.

Eventually I realized that the more turns I ran, the more money I lost. I could no longer stay above water by working extra hours myself at no pay. This was a critical time for Flying Buffalo (and, I think, for the PBM industry). I had to decide whether I wanted to go the way of all the other PBM hobbyists who became too popular for their own good, and drop everything, and go become a CPA, or make Flying Buffalo into a real for-profit business.

It may sound kind of funny, but I made a very tough decision: I doubled my prices. I took a lot of flack from people who didn't realize that this wasn't a big conglomerate deciding it wasn't making enough money, but was instead a small-businessman realizing that he couldn't provide professional services at amateur prices. Fortunately I didn't really have any competition at this point, so enough customers stayed with me to keep things going. I wonder if the other PBM companies now in business realize how lucky they are that I went through that agony before they started in business?

You may wonder why I've spent so much time talking about something that happened ten years ago. Mostly I want to make the point that it is happening now in England. I just realized it, but the highest-priced PBM in England is charging the US equivalent of $2.25 per turn. Most are a lot less than that! The gentleman who is charging the *most* recently told me that he sat down and figured out that he was losing money on every turn he ran for his customers. (Where have I heard that before?) He wants to raise his price about 50%, but is afraid he will lose 75% of his customers. It's really a shame, because as long as the players in England assume that the moderators owe them free turns, they will get service that is worth what they are paying for it!

Growth

The most obvious thing about the PBM industry since the very beginning is the huge "turnover" in PBM companies. It's easy to get into this business, and well over a hundred have already done so. Some haven't lasted past a single advertisement. Some have lasted for years and disappeared with great controversy. (Longtime *Space Gamer* readers will no doubt remember ***Lords of Valetia***, a hand-run ***Dungeons & Dragons***-type of game which reportedly took money from as many as a thousand potential players and gradually faded away. Rumor has it that Elmer Hinton is still running turns of ***LOV*** for some people. I would love to have confirmation of this rumor from anyone still receiving turns!) The ways small PBM companies disappear are as varied as the number of small companies themselves. Some (unfortunately few) send refunds to all their customers and announce that they are getting out of the business. Some close up shop and disappear entirely. Most just kind of fade away, with turns getting further and further apart until eventually the players realize that they haven't had a turn or an answer to a letter in over a year.

A few of the small PBM companies have successfully made the transition from a part-time hobby to a regular business. And many of the smaller companies have finally established a reputation for reliable and regular service. It's a shame that they have to live through the reputation of the dozens and dozens of small companies that have taken money and disappeared. Now that there are enough companies in the business that the rest of the gaming world is starting to pay attention to us (note the new category in the Origins awards, "Best PBM Game," and the number of general gaming magazines that are starting to print PBM sections and go after PBM advertising) it's about time we had our own trade association.

I see a trade association as something that can try to keep track of who is still in the business and who isn't; that a customer can complain to if he thinks he has been treated unfairly (and that can objectively tell the customer he is expecting too much, if he is); that can bring about a consensus about what is and is not a "fair trade practice"; and most especially, that can advertise play-by-mail to the general public in order to get more people involved in this great hobby of ours.

Last summer I announced an attempt to form the Play By Mail Association (PBMA). I was immediately jumped on by a bunch of people who thought I wanted to (a) control the PBM industry, or (b) tell everyone else how to run their businesses. Well, (a) the idea that anyone could control this industry is laughable on the face of it. As I've already said, *anyone* can get into this business with very little investment (and sometimes I think that everyone already has!). And (b) when I talk about "fair trade practices," I have in mind a public dialogue about what's fair and what's not, where a company will be able to explain why it does things the way it does. We certainly cannot (and should not) demand that every member have X number of back-up computers, or pay refunds in a certain manner, or advertise in a certain way (although I would like to do something about companies who advertise "computer-moderated" games when all they have is a word processor that prints out their battle descriptions!).

At any rate, we *have* formed the PBMA, and there are already 25 member companies. Individuals may support the goals of the PBMA by joining as consumer members ($10 a year); they will receive the Association Newsletter and the right to vote on the Association PBM Awards. (We plan to give away our own awards at Origins along with the H.G. Wells Awards and the Charles Roberts Awards.) You can join by sending $10 to PBMA, 8149 E. Thomas Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85251, or you can just send us a self-addressed stamped envelope and get a list of the names and addresses of the member companies.

There has been an unexpected benefit to forming the PBMA. I recently receive a request for more information from a fellow who I recognized as having run a PBM company many years ago. He quit answering letters and moved away, leaving quite a few customers in the lurch. You can believe I won't let him get into the Association without making amends for that!

PBEM

Let's see . . . I'm also supposed to talk about recent developments in PBM. The big one these days, of course, is play-by-electronic-mail, or PBEM. I know Steve Jackson thinks that PBEM will eliminate PBM, but I'm closer to it than he is, and I don't think so. Not for many years yet, anyway. The majority of our population still doesn't have access to computers, modems, and computer networks. Those that do are used to the kind of computer games with "instant results." I don't know about everyone, but one of the reasons that *I* play PBM games is that I like having a week or two (or at least several days) between turns, so I can think about what I'm going to do next. Flying Buffalo has been pushing PBEM for over two years now, and we still only have about 10% or so of our customers on the networks.

However, having said that, I'm still somewhat surprised at how few of the PBM companies are on one or more of the networks. I may be wrong, but I think Flying Buffalo is the only one on three (CompuServe, the Source, and MCI Mail). However, those of us who are computer-fluent can still make use of the networks, especially MCI. As an example, I am playing in a game of ***Illuminati PBM*** by Adventure Systems (Box 22305, Houston, TX 77227). I am the World Terrorist Alliance, and recently I received a turn that told me I had been attacked by the Society of Assassins. They neutralized Cuba, tried to neutralize Libya, and attempted to steal money from me. I quickly ran to my computer and typed out my counter-attack, and transmitted it to MCI Mail. Adventure Systems is not on MCI Mail at the moment, so MCI printed out my letter in Dallas and mailed it from there, saving about two days in transmission. (If I had been in a hurry, I could have paid MCI $25 and they would have hand-delivered my move in four hours!) (And if that sneaky assassin guy would answer my diplomatic message and tell me his address, I could send him my truce suggestions in the same way, without even using the long-distance phone.) (If anyone reading this is in game #17 and wants to ally, write me care of Flying Buffalo. Assuming, of course, that the Society of Assassins hasn't already killed me off by the time you read this . . .)

Magazines

Now where was I? Ah, yes, I was going to finish up by talking about the rise and fall of the PBM magazines. Several of the PBM companies (including Flying Buffalo, of course) publish their own newsletters, but these are of interest only to their own customers. The first magazine that I know of which was devoted entirely to PBM and which was not published by a PBM company was a fanzine first called *Nuts & Bolts of Starweb*, then changed to *Nuts & Bolts of PBM* and then *Nuts & Bolts of Gaming*. It was a fun magazine, but somewhat ahead of its time, and it had no financial backing. It has faded away, but the Play By Mail Association plans to give free one-year consumer memberships to the former subscribers. Rich Buda (the editor of *Nuts & Bolts*) will be one of the co-editors of the PBMA newsletter.

About two years ago, two different people in two different countries noted the lack of a really professional independent magazine devoted to PBM. So Bob McLain announced the formation of *Gaming Universal*, and Nicky Palmer announced *Flagship*. *Gaming Universal* was launched in the US, with lots of advertising, name columnists, and extensive comparisons of many different PBM games written by Bob McLain (who knew details about PBM games I never even heard of). Bob got three issues published (all late) before he finally decided that a PBM magazine wasn't going to make a lot of money. This industry is still pretty darn small, and the only way a magazine makes it (other than as a labor of love) is by heavy advertising. And there just aren't that many PBM companies who can afford a big advertising budget. At least Bob's magazine didn't just "disappear into the sunset." Apparently most of his articles and advertisements will appear in future issues of *Flagship*, and I am told that subscribers have been offered game credit by Advent Games.

Flagship is published in England, and from the beginning it has tried to cover both US and UK games. Issue #6 is on the boat right now, and so far all six have been "on time." Issue #6 also marks the start of the publication of two "editions," the US edition and the UK edition, each containing some material of interest only to its readers.

There remains one US PBM magazine which started out even smaller than ***Nuts & Bolts*** and which gets better every issue. I have high hopes that *Paper Mayhem* will turn out to be a really good independent magazine.

Goodbye

That's about all for now. Keep 'em flying. □

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Where We're Going
by Steve Jackson

Well, where *I'm* going next is Milwaukee, for Gen Con. I just got back from a great little con in Saskatoon. We'll also be hitting Joplin, Tulsa, and several other places this summer. Know something? Conventions are *fun*.

I'm a big believer in wargame conventions for several reasons. First, they let the clan get together. Wargamers tend to be a solitary breed; a con is a great chance to make new friends and friendly enemies. Second, they're a great way to spread the word about new games. (I don't think SJ Games would have gotten off the ground if not for conventions). Third, they're a great way for *companies* to find out what *gamers* want. And fourth, they're *fun*. Did I already say that?

The big problem with most wargame conventions — even the biggest ones — is that they are somewhat less than organized. This may be unavoidable. Game conventions are typically put on by amateurs, doing it either for the love of the hobby, or for personal glory. I know it's possible to run a convention professionally to make money and *still* show everybody a good time, because our local Austin convention is run that way. But it's rare.

I wonder . . . Would it be worthwhile to have a special meeting at Gen Con, for *convention organizers?* Maybe a national organization of organizers is too much to hope for, but some sort of loose network, for sharing information, ideas, and manpower — *that* should be possible. A newsletter would be even better, if someone wanted to do the work. It could help make the conventions bigger, better, and more profitable, and that would benefit the whole hobby.

How about it? Who'll pick up the ball? If you're interested, give me a call, or drop me a line. Applications are now being taken for Boss and Organizer. I *don't* want to be the head man; I'm not an expert, and I've got a few other things to do. But I'd like to see it get done.

How about a get-together at Gen Con in Milwaukee?

New and Upcoming

Things are going very well around the editorial office; with one exception (mine, @#$$%& it) things are going pretty close to schedule.

TOON Strikes Again came out, right on time. We hear that some retailers didn't take *TOON* seriously at first, but are now stocking it: "If there's a supplement out, the game must be for real." So if your local store didn't have it before, look again.

Uncle Albert's 2035 Catalog has been out for a month as I write this. It ended up weird beyond our wildest dreams. If you play ***Car Wars,*** you'll like it. If you don't play ***Car Wars***, you should at least borrow a copy and read through it anyway, just for fun.

The ***Car Wars Deluxe Edition*** and ***Deluxe Road Sections*** were our Origins releases. For once, we actually had an Origins release that was ready *before* Origins! Deluxe Edition sales have surpassed all our expectations — the game is actually out of print at the moment, because our initial box order was 7,500, and we sold those within three weeks . . . Sort of irritating, but if you have to have problems, that's one of the best kinds.

Adventure Systems' ***PBM Car Wars*** is coming along. They have not announced a starting date — watch this space for more information.

Origin Systems' ***Autoduel*** should also be out soon. This is for the Apple II series computers; part arcade game, part adventure game, set in the ***Car Wars*** world. You start out by building a car in ***Car Wars*** style and go on from there. We have seen several playtest versions; the most recent one actually worked! It's going to be fun.

OSI is also working on an Apple version of ***Ogre*** — a straight implementation of the game, allowing you to play either side against the computer. There was a preliminary version on display at Origins.

Computers At Last!

Speaking of computers — SJ Games has finally gotten its long-awaited "good" computer system. Henceforth, Editorial will rejoice in an IBM-PC with 10MB hard disk, modem, and good WP software; the business department has a similar system, but with 20MB and up-to-date accounting programs. This means we will be working a lot more efficiently. It also means we will be encouraging writers to send in their material on disk.

GURPS Update

Well, I'm still working. But things have gone more slowly than I had hoped. To be honest, the reworked combat system was still a dog. How do I know? Because I had to *explain* it to our staffers before playtest. And nobody around the office wanted to play it after it was explained. That is a *bad sign* . . .

So I went home and tried again. Several things got thrown out entirely. For instance, I had really wanted to use a square-based movement system . . . but after a year of trying, it was clear that hexagons were simply better. So it's hexagons. Enough said. Similarly, I had been working with an "action point" system of regulating combat. It was detailed; with more work, it would have been realistic. But I don't think it ever would have been playable enough. *I* liked it. But I was about the only one . . .

On the other hand, character generation was always good, and it gets better every time we fool with it. Skills and success rolls have held up very well. In fact, the combat system is the last big hurdle. It needs to be *both* very realistic *and* very playable . . . and shooting for both goals at once is tricky, to say the least. And nothing else can be finalized until the combat system really works!

But the re-reworked combat system seems to be "it." The staff now likes to play it, and the people at the playtest/demos in Saskatoon and Baltimore gave it very high marks. So . . . what we're going to do is release the combat game separately, under the title ***Man to Man***. That gives us a ***GURPS*** release for 1985, *without* rushing the rest of the package. Although ***Man to Man*** covers *only* combat, it has been specifically formatted to serve as an introduction to the whole ***GURPS*** system. I think you'll like it.

Man to Man will be a single rulebook — 64 pages or so — *plus* lots of bound-in maps, pregenerated characters, player aid sheets, and ***Cardboard Heroes*** miniatures. Retail price will be no more than $12.95 — depending on the final printing bids.

The game will be playable in several ways. The "Basic Combat System" needs no map; it's suitable for roleplaying adventures where you just want to hack/slash/kill the monster/grab the treasure. For most people, it will be only a steppingstone to the "Advanced Combat System," which uses a hex map and adds lots of detail. And you can use the Advanced System either as a combat module for an RPG — *or* as the nucleus for your own ***GURPS*** campaign — *or* as a stand-along boardgame of man-to-man combat.

We are still shooting for a Gen Con release. We might miss it by a week or so — I got sick at a very inconvenient time — but it's coming along very well.

Finally! □

Capsule Reviews

Space Gamer reviews boardgames, roleplaying games, computer games, play aids, publications, and game supplements. We review play-by-mail games if a reviewer is enrolled. We will attempt to review any science fiction or fantasy game if the publisher supplies a copy. We do not guarantee reviews of historical games. *Space Gamer* may publish a review of a game we are not sent — *if* a reader submits a review.

The staff will make reasonable efforts to check reviews for factual accuracy, but opinions expressed by reviewers are not necessarily those of the magazine.

Games and game items for which we are seeking reviews include ***Black Morn Manor, Hellsknight, Illuminati*** Expansion Set 3, ***The Last Starfighter Combat Game, The Last Starfighter: Duel in Space, Paranoia Gamemaster Screen, Psi World, RHAND, Sologames, Songsmith, Sundog, Supergame, Starbattles, Star Fleet Battles Commander's SSD Book #5, Tech Law, Terror By Night, Vampires,*** and ***Vapors Don't Shoot Back.***

GAMES

HAMMER'S SLAMMERS (Mayfair Games); $17. Designed by H.N. Voss. 18" x 24" 12-piece "puzzle-cut" map, 16-page rule booklet, 16-page scenario booklet, reference sheet of game charts and tables, 328 die-cut counters, two six-sided dice, boxed. For one to four players; playing time depends upon the scenario, but roughly one to three hours. Published 1984.

Hammer's Slammers, if it's not readily apparent, is a boardgame based upon the David Drake story collection of the same name. It depicts the actions of various military and mercenary units, including those of one Colonel Alois Hammer. During a player's turn, units are rallied, paradrops and counter paradrop fire resolved, movement occurs, both players conduct indirect, counter-artillery, and direct fires, and finally close assaults are resolved. Players alternate in this sequence until the end of the scenario (there are 14 to choose from, of varying levels of complexity).

Hammer's Slammer gets high marks for component quality. The box cover is a beautiful reprint of the original cover art from the book (for quick viewer identification), the counters are in bright and easily discernible colors, and even the map is of excellent quality. The best thing about ***Hammer's Slammers*** is that it will satisfy almost any boardgamer interested in a "shoot-'em-up" game. The rules are short (taking up only seven pages of the 16-page booklet) and simple enough for a beginner, yet the scenarios are complex enough to keep even the advanced player happy. The "Design Your Own Scenarios" section is also nice to see, especially given the fact that without it, the cost per scenario would be $1.22 (not including local and state taxes)!

There are some problems with ***Hammer's Slammers***, the biggest being the hacked-up rule sections for indirect fire, counter artillery fire, and morale. All three of these sections seem to have been put together without regard for "realism" or effects as portrayed in the David Drake stories. For those who are not aware of the unwritten rule for designing a game based upon fictional work (why it has remained unwritten for so long is partly because no one has broken it before): Ignoring the reality of a situation isn't a crime, ignoring the *author* is. ***Hammer's Slammers*** is guilty as charged. Where the stories address the problems of command control and the importance of leaders, like Alois Hammer, the game provides an oversimplistic generalization of morale in the form of rally rules. The same can be said for indirect and counter artillery fire.

In rereading the above, I think I may have been just a little too demanding of ***Hammer's Slammers***. In fact, there shouldn't be any reason for me to dislike the game at all, because it has almost the same exact mechanics as ***Panzerblitz*** (a game I truly enjoy). Indeed, tactics which work on the Russian front appear to have the same effect on the futuristic battlefield portrayed in ***Hammer's Slammers***. Maybe it is the fact that Mr. Voss, who was instrumental in making ***Morrow Project*** the technical marvel that it is, so blatantly "borrowed" the ***Panzerblitz*** design, right down to the organization of information on the counters. The least he could have done was share his byline with James Dunnigan.

If you enjoy the simplicity and groundbreaking innovation that ***Panzerblitz*** brought to boardgaming in the early 1970s, you'll love this one. However, if you are looking for anything *new* in game design — disappointment is only $17 away.

—Jerry Epperson

DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN (Nova); $12.95. Designed by Alfred Leonardi. Two 4½" x 6" 144-page books and two character sheets, boxed. For two players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

This is the latest in Nova's line of picture-book games. It is similar in design to ***Ace of Aces***. For those not familiar with these games (where have you been?), each book contains numbered full-page illustrations which portray what each player sees from his position, generally looking toward his opponent. The books are keyed so that at the same page number, when you are looking right (for example) to see him or her, your opponent is looking left to see you. By choosing maneuvers listed under each picture and cross-referencing them, players are sent to a page showing their new positions relative to each other. Players basically dogfight across the skies in this way. In ***Dragonriders of Pern*** they are not opponents trying to bring each other down, but wingmates attemping to flame Thread, as in Anne McCaffrey's series of books. Each player tries to gain prestige points in this way, but must cooperate with his or her wingmate: This is because the Thread seems to follow each dragon's tail, and there are a limited number of turns before the Thread hits the ground. Dragons can be burned by Thread or by a wingmate's dragon, with the amount of damage each can take based upon its color. Maneuvers are ranked by difficulty, with ability based upon dragon type and riders' expertise. As in the novels, dragons can go "between." Each book contains 115 illustrated pages, rules, and a prologue by Anne McCaffrey which outlines the history of Pern and its dragons.

Surprisingly enough, what appears at first to be just an ***Ace of Aces*** variant aimed at McCaffrey fans turns out to be possibly the most challenging of the picture-book games, because of the cooperation required. An experienced rider (not player) can easily outmaneuver a less experienced wingmate, but has fewer turns to flame the Thread and loses more points for failure, so cooperation is a necessity. The illustrations are very flavorful. The advanced and campaign rules, and rules for going "between," play easily.

The only criticism I have of the game is that the Thread movement seems a bit unrealistic, but as this is what creates the need for cooperation, it is not a serious flaw.

I found ***Dragonriders of Pern*** to be my second-favorite set in the picture-book series, just behind the *Handy Rotary* planes, and recommend it to anyone, diehard McCaffrey fan or not. At $12.95 it may not be a bargain, but it is a good value for the money.

—Lester W. Smith

THE LONELY MOUNTAIN (Iron Crown Enterprises); $18. Designed by Coleman Charlton. 12-page rulebook, 18" x 24" mapsheet, 18" x 23" display and tables sheet, 216 cards, 78 counters, two 6-sided dice. For one to six players; playing time two to four hours. Published 1984.

Iron Crown Enterprises apparently has an iron lock on Tolkien licensing, and with nearly 20 entries in their catalog so far, they seem determined to get their money's worth. Experienced gamers tend to be (rightfully) skeptical of such arrangements, but so far I.C.E. has done a consistently credible job in their adaptations of Middle-earth material. The roleplaying system is workable, the modules I've seen have been pretty good, and their map-posters look great on the game-room wall. I.C.E. faltered, however, with its initial boardgame release, ***Fellowship of the Ring*** was ambitious and beautifully rendered, but otherwise unremarkable.

Happily, ***The Lonely Mountain*** is a different story. It's considerably scaled down from ***Fellowship of the Ring*** and benefits accordingly. Players choose to lead similar groups of dwarves, elves, men, orcs, or "freebooters" into the secret catacombs of the Lonely Mountain and make off with as much treasure as they can carry. Naturally, there are plenty of monsters to make things difficult, but the real twist is the presence of Smaug, the guardian dragon (whom you may remember from *The Hobbit*). Smaug is nearly invulnerable and may pop up at virtually any time. Once he does, the players must scramble to get out as Smaug immediately begins to close up all the escape routes. But players must also weight the temptation to ransack an extra room or two before they leave, knowing that once they're gone, they can't get back in. This is only one of the many strategic decisions that must be made in ***Lonely Mountain***, and players who aren't careful are certain to fail. (My party of dwarves was wiped out twice before Smaug ever appeared.) Since it's a challenge just to survive, ***Lonely Mountain*** works fine as a solitaire game. A variety of creature and treasure cards makes for enjoyable return engagements, and advanced rules add many tantalizing op-

tions for players who feel they've mastered the basic game.

For a game supposedly based on *The Hobbit*, you'll probably be surprised to hear that there's not a hobbit to be found. As a matter of fact, the relationship between ***Lonely Mountain*** and the Tolkien books is extremely slight. If your only interest in this is to add to your Middle-earth collection, you'll miss nothing by passing it up. I'm also disappointed that the designer couldn't come up with a better basic idea than the tired old search-the-dungeon, find-the-treasure, kill-the-monster routine. Let's hope that with the publication of ***Lonely Mountain*** we're seeing the last of the variations on the most overworked cliche in fantasy gaming.

I'll give ***Lonely Mountain*** a thumbs up if I.C.E. will promise two things: (1) no more hack-and-slash dungeon boardgames, and (2) if you're going to promote your stuff as Tolkien products, give us a little more Tolkien next time. That said, nice job.

—Rick Swan

WIZARDS' REALM, RINGBINDER EDITION (Mystic Swamp); $20. Designed by Cheryl W. Duval, Niels Erickson, William G. Murphy, and Clifford Polite. 8½" x 11" 64-page rulebook, 11" x 17" double-sided map, character sheets, double-sided (square and hex grid) mapping sheets, 4 Gem dice (Gamescience), *Cardboard Heroes* set #1 (Steve Jackson Games), errata sheet, and "D" ringbinder. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

Wizards' Realm is a fantasy roleplaying system you've seen advertised in *Space Gamer* for some time now. The softbound rulebook (with maps) is available alone for $10, or as part of the set described above. Two things about the set strike the buyer immediately. The first is the artwork; the second is the runes. These cover everything in the set except the dice and the *Cardboard Heroes*. Even the errata sheet shows a heretofore unseen view of the lady in the ads, and the runic errata are written in runic; a runic alphabet is included in the rulebook. The rules are a blend of levels, gained by experience points, and skill credits spent to buy talents and spells or increase their chances of success. Characters have eight randomly-generated characteristics from which their attack numbers, defense numbers, survival points (similar to hit points), and power points (for spells) are figured. Character classes and alignments are not restrictive, but serve as guidelines. Melee combat is basically the total of attack number, weapon rating, and 1D20, minus the total of defense number, armor rating, shield or weapon parry rating, and 1D20. Excess points are taken off of survival points. Ranged combat is adjusted dexterity or less on 1D20, and barehanded combat is strength and 1D20 minus constitution and 1D20. Fatigue loss of survival points begins after a number of turns equal to constitution.

The system is effective. The rules are easy to learn, yet provide space for freedom of action. The races are familiar enough to be easily understood, yet different enough to be interesting. A strong atmosphere of fantasy pervades the game, and experienced gamers are able to design exciting characters, while beginning players can easily grasp the mechanics. Combat plays smoothly, and the magic is interesting. Space does not permit mention of all the nice little touches in the rules.

Unfortunately, there are some questions left unanswered which the referee will have to decide arbitrarily. For example, characters can carry a percentage of their body weight without encumbrance, based on their strength, but body weight is left up to the players' imagination. Apparently the designers never played with a rules lawyer.

I recommend the ***Wizards' Realm Ringbinder Edition*** for anyone interested in fantasy roleplaying. It contains everything needed for a campaign, and is worth considerably more than its price of $20.

—Lester W. Smith

WITCHLORD (Litrex 84); $25. Designed by Cameron Ball. Fantasy boardgame. One 8-page rulebook, three reference sheets, 120 playing cards, one 16" x 25" playing board, six lead miniatures, one 20-sided die, one 6-sided die. For one to six players; playing time two to four hours. Published 1984.

Here's a question for you: How badly does the world need another boardgame based on ***Dungeons & Dragons?*** ***D&D*** translates to boardgames about as well as ***Monopoly*** translates to roleplaying (and please — don't any of you desperate designers get any wiseguy ideas), but I guess this has yet to sink in fully. Witness ***Witchlord***, a hopelessly derivative fantasy boardgame made all the more pathetic by the wide-eyed sincerity with which it's presented.

This is no slap-dash effort, not by a long shot. The components include four decks of glossy playing cards and six detailed cast-metal figures. There are charts and play aids and an amazingly complete set of rules condensed into only four pages. As brief as they are, the rules adequately cover combat, magic use, special arena encounters, and even character advancement. If nothing else, designer Cameron Ball writes a good rulebook — this makes Steve Jackson's ***One-Page Bulge*** look wordy by comparison.

Players assume the roles of fighters, magicians, thieves, etc., and march around the board, where they are informed of their current position in the "dungeon": They may be climbing a stairway, approaching an alcove, or entering a room. (The rules tell the players to plot their progress on graph paper, but as it has no effect whatsoever on the game, why bother?) If you enter a room, a card is drawn which directs you to various charts that generate monsters and treasures. Kill the monsters, you get the treasures. Get enough treasures and survive the occasional "arena combat" (a glorified monster combat, nothing special) and you win. That's about it. If this sounds like your idea of a good time, then you're either new to fantasy gaming or you're very easy to please.

What's frustrating is that in his foreword, Ball says that the original draft of the game was well in excess of 200 pages in length. There had to be at least a few original ideas in there someplace — where'd they all go? Here's hoping that he'll take a close look at his original manuscript and give it another shot. In the meantime, if you simply have to own a ***D&D***-styled boardgame, check your local toy store and see if you can scrounge up an old copy of TSR's ***Dungeon.*** It isn't any fun either, but it's a lot cheaper.

—Rick Swan

SUPPLEMENTS

THE SECRET WARS (TSR); $6. Designed by "Jaunty" Jeff Grubb. Module for ***Marvel Super Heroes.*** One 8½" x 11" combination reference screen and protective folder; one booklet of character statistics and one adventure book, both 16 pages and 8½" x 11"; one 34" x 22" double-sided map depicting Battleworld. For two to ten players; playing time one to three hours, depending on whether or not you've read the whole *Secret Wars* series. Published October 1984.

Based on Jim Shooter's Marvel mini-series of the same name, ***The Secret Wars*** takes place on the planet called Battleworld, which was created by the mysterious, omnipotent Beyonder so he could study the human concept of desire. The Beyonder pits superheroes against super-villains in a battle to the death, with the prize being the fulfillment of all their heart's desires. For the heroes, it's the chance to be accepted like everyone else, while for the villains, it's the chance for unlimited power.

Secret Wars has a few good points. One point that almost qualifies as being good is that the module reveals what abstract MacGuffin the Beyonder was after, as well as the Wars themselves. The problem is that both of these outcomes were rather droll. Any players who read the series would have "this-is-what-*I'd*-have-done-instead" ideas floating around in their skulls. The designers have taken most of these ideas into account by structuring the module accordingly — suggestions and helpful hints are included for various deviations from the original story. The other good point is that while there were several heroes who did not take part in the Wars, the module includes rules on running these characters, including your homebuilt ones.

Now for the bad points. We can't blame the plot on the gang at TSR, because they weren't guilty of writing it. What we *can* jump on them about is certain problems with the mechanics of the module, if not the game itself. For one thing, there's the options listed for alternative outcomes: The designers seem to think that if the heroes succeed in offing their opponents, the only thing they'd want is to be depowered and become accepted as normal people. Bunk! The logical option would be either something major, like obliterating crime on Earth for all eternity, or something minor, like curing Aunt May's arthritis. Those wimpos who sided with Doom aren't the only evildoers on Earth, so why become normal and fall prey to their vengeance? And while we're ranting about heroes, there are the annoying Karma figures listed for each hero. Sure, newcomers like Captain Marvel and the recycled Iron

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Man would have low Karma, but Thor and Captain America? Bunk again! These guys have been around too long to have a Karma listing less than three digits. This is a serious flaw, not only with the module, but with the whole game.

Sticking to the flaws, there's TSR's stupid policy of seldom listing a hero's stats in more than one module. *All* the stats for *all* the heroes in this adventure should have been listed. They aren't, and this only makes matters worse. What character stats *are* listed are vital to GMs for running other scenarios with those heroes; to buy ***Secret Wars*** for any other reason is a mistake. But then again, everyone is entitled to one mistake. Jim Shooter made twelve of them, and the last one was double-sized.

—Bob Mosley III

SIGNAL GK (Game Designers' Workshop); $6. Designed by Marc Miller. Adventure for ***Traveller***. 5½" x 8" 48-page booklet. Number of players indefinite; playing time three to nine hours. Published 1985.

Finally, an adventure set in the Solomani Rim that allows some freewheeling adventuring! ***Signal GK*** is a tale of political intrigue, defections, secret agents, and electronic intelligence. The adventurers must facilitate the defection of an eccentric researcher to the Imperium — an easy job. Then complications set in: Solomani Security wants the researcher dead before he reveals century-old secrets, and the researcher wants to go prospecting for a kind of Holy Grail — naturally-evolved electronics! The multi-phase scenario is presented in easy stages, progressing from the simple defection to exploration for the Living Chip to assaults, assassination attempts, and a mad retreat for the safety of Terra with pursuit by bloodthirsty agents, culminating with a liner sabotaged with the adventurers aboard; repairs must be made before it plunges into a gas giant! The material for the adventures are all there: Detailed descriptions of the major NPCs, complete with motivations and stats; excellent descriptions of three planets, including mapping suggestions; complete deck plans of the Type M 600-ton Subsidized Liner, with a section on the economics of the vessel; and a discussions of the biology of the naturally-evolved circuit chip.

Slowly but surely, the starships of ***Traveller*** are being mapped. The plans for the ship in ***Signal GK*** will be the crowning attraction for most players. Still, the adventure building up to the use of those plans is just as good as any run in less stifling regions of the Imperium; even though it's civilized to the point of stagnation, the Solomani Rim doesn't have to be boring, and this adventure proves it. I particularly liked the way the adventure was split into three sections, allowing the GM to stretch out the adventure without interrupting plot flow.

As usual, I have trouble finding flaws with GDW ***Traveller*** adventures, and ***Signal GK*** is no exception. It's well-presented, a good adventure, well-packaged, and even has some illustrations! BUT. Almost as it was released, GDW raised the price on ***Signal GK*** by a fifth. For the same money, you get a lot more from other game companies; indeed, ***Signal GK*** costs nearly half as much as the set of 10 deck plans FASA produced years ago, deck plans including the Liner from which this adventure derives its ship.

Recommendations? If you don't run adventures in the Solomani Rim and you have the plans from that FASA set, then steer clear of this adventure. If you have a campaign on the Rim, or you'd like the plans for the Liner, then ***Signal GK*** is worth the high price. Barely.

—Craig Sheeley

RANGERS OF THE NORTH (Iron Crown Enterprises); $10. Designed by John David Ruemmler. Adventure module for ***Middle-earth Role-playing***. 8½" x 11" 56-page book, 8-page map-book insert. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1985.

My friendly game store manager tells me that more and more of his regular ***Dungeons & Dragons*** customers are making the switch to I.C.E.'s ***Middle-earth Role-Playing*** system. Although that's depressing news for those of us who have invested hundreds of dollars in ***D&D*** material, after a few sessions of ***MERP*** I can see why that might be true. The game system itself is nothing particularly innovative, but the source material is the real thing. Why, pray tell, would any hardcore Tolkien fan settle for TSR's derivative world when they can get the genuine article from I.C.E.?

Rangers of the North focuses on the areas of the Arthedrain Kingdom, a rugged and diverse region that provides especially good settings for Middle-earth adventuring, ranging from the frozen tundra of the Northlands to the comfortable forests of the hobbits' Shire. Bilbo Baggins, Gandalf the Grey, and Meriadoc Brandybuck are among the familiar names (but note that full statistics are only given for a few, such as Aragorn and Gandalf). There's an abundance of background information — in fact, to say that designer John Ruemmler did a thorough job is an understatement (you can, for instance, find the temperature in the Hills of Evendim for any given month within fifteen degrees). The text is well-organized, solidly written, and makes for interesting reading. Five good scenarios are included, and there's certainly enough material for plenty more.

The gamer who's not a student of Tolkien is at a definite disadvantage here; one who's never read any of the books will really be groping in the dark. We had both in our sessions, and it was just about impossible to maintain balance — keep this in mind when playing a ***MERP*** campaign. I also wonder how far I.C.E. is going to stretch their Middle-earth material. There's something like a dozen roleplaying books out now with more to come, and each one I've seen shows the strain of too much padding.

But considering how badly this could've been bungled, I.C.E. is to be commended for doing a bang-up job. And I'm betting we've yet to see the best. Until then, ***Rangers of the North*** ought to keep all would-be hobbits plenty happy.

—Rick Swan

TRAIL OF TSATHOGGHUA (Chaosium); $10. Designed by Keith Herber. Adventure module for ***Call of Cthulhu***. 8½" x 11" 64-page book (including 16 pages of removable handouts). Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

All right, I'll admit it. I'm biased. ***Call of Cthulhu*** is hands-down my favorite roleplaying game and has been for over a year now (a long time for a guy whose allegiance tends to shift in a strong breeze). Consequently, each new ***Cthulhu*** module is a red-letter gaming day around the Swan house — when the massive ***Masks of Nyarlathotep*** came out, we locked ourselves in for four straight days, school and work be damned! (We have our priorities straight around here, pal.)

While ***Trail of Tsathogghua*** doesn't quite scale the heights of ***Masks***, it's another fine addition to Chaosium's unbroken string of first-class Chaosium modules (the all-around quality of Chaosium roleplaying material may be the most consistent in the industry — we'll forgive them ***Ringworld***). ***Trail*** takes the Investigators to Greenland to examine a stone slab covered with strange markings that was discovered in a glacier by Eskimos. As always, there's more to the discovery than meets the eye, and the trail eventually leads to the site of an ancient temple, to a man harboring an incredible secret, and to a fascinating encounter with a lost race. Great stuff! The module finishes with a second adventure called "The Haunted House," which requires the investigators to exorcise a supernatural entity from a hundred-year-old mansion. The adventures are tightly written, flawlessly presented, and contain plenty of twists and surprises. The newspaper clippings, journal excerpts, and other handouts are terrifically rendered and add a lot to the fun. (This format of cut-out clues is such a great idea, I'm surprised more roleplaying systems don't use it.)

My only criticism has to do with "The Haunted House." Although it's a nice enough change of pace, it's also a little mundane for a game with the scope of ***Call of Cthulhu***, not to mention that it has virtually no connection with the Cthulhu Mythos. And both "Trail" and "House" are long on investigation and short on action — that's not a criticism, just a forewarning to Investigators with itchy trigger fingers.

If you've been happily devouring Chaosium's ***Cthulhu*** releases, rest assured that ***Trail of Tsathogghua*** is another top-notch effort. This is roleplaying at its finest, and I'm ready for the next one. And who knows . . . maybe it'll even have a title I can pronounce.

—Rick Swan

THRONE OF EVIL (Mayfair); $6. Designed by Stephen Bourne. One 32-page adventure module suitable for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** and similar systems. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

On the cover of the adventure now in front of me is a pleasant illustration of a fair maiden and her bearded boyfriend riding down a pleasant country lane on their pleasant white horses. They may be on their way to a picnic. Across the top, in big yellow letters, are the words ***Throne of Evil.*** I know . . . it doesn't make sense to me, either, but neither does the release of what is little more than a by-the-numbers rewrite of a typical TSR hack-and-slasher circa 1978.

Anyone who's even casually experienced with fantasy roleplaying will be in familiar territory with ***Throne of Evil.*** The characters meet at an inn. They are sent to a castle to dispose of an evil lord, but (hold your breath) the only access is through a cavern stuffed with all kinds of bad old monsters. Etc. For what it's worth, there are plenty of well-rendered maps, including one just for the players (always a nice touch). At least you can sense the hand of a good editor at work as there is very little superfluous material to distract from the, uh, adventure.

If Mayfair indeed felt compelled to add a simple hack-and-slasher to their ***RoleAids*** line, you'd think they'd have at least insisted on some new monsters or some new treasures or at least an interesting trap or two. Instead, we get the usual assortment of snoozers (dire wolf, anyone?). The "political intrigue" referred to in the introduction is little more than an uninvolving fluctuation of loyalties among some of the NPCs. Somebody ought to tell these guys that this approach to fantasy modules is hopelessly old-fashioned. Sure, it's got its place — it's a nice way to introduce young players to the hobby, if nothing else. But it's already been done to death and done much better elsewhere.

If you have an opening for a product of this kind, my suggestion is to pick up an old TSR ***D&D*** module. Just for old time's sake, I bought a half dozen of 'em at a book store recently for a buck and a half each. As for ***Throne of Evil***, let's let it go as an unfortunate misfire from the usually excellent ***RoleAids*** series. I mean, nobody's perfect.

—Rick Swan

MORIA (Iron Crown Enterprises); $10. Designed by Peter C. Fenlon. Module for *J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth* series. 8½" x 11" 72-page book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

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Moria — Khazad-dum — the city of the Dwarves from *Lord of the Rings*. The largest "dungeon" that could ever be imagined. I, like many who read about it and were boggled at the size of the place, thought it could never be put on paper, since its creator was dead. I.C.E. has done the unthinkable and presents ***Moria***, the first module in a series of three covering the various aspects of the dwarf city, from inhabitants and maps to plants and traps, and much, much more. The module starts with conversion tables for translating statistics from the ***Rolemaster*** format to other systems. Also included is a lengthy section of essays — a third of the book! — dwelling on the history of Moria, the society and technology of the dwarves who built it, and the structure of the city itself. Want to know the Elvish names of the types of stone? The patterns of stonework on the walls? Dwarf war tactics? Dwarf coinage and rates of exchange? All here, in the essays. *Then* you come to the maps and diagrams. The sparse maps in ***Moria*** outline major thoroughfares, roads, the fissure which splits the city, and major points of interest, such as the King's Chambers, the Chamber of Records, etc. The rest of the structures, such as dwellings, workshops, smithies, dungeons, and tombs are given generic descriptions and left to the gamemaster to place in the gigantic labyrinth. Finally, the later inhabitants — orcs, trolls, and the incredible Balrog — are listed, with tribal dispositions, descriptions, and placements. The book ends with some near-suicidal adventure suggestions and statistics on the dwarf-kings and other denizens of the mines.

The amount of material in ***Moria*** is staggering. This is no module, it's a book! The maps, though nowhere near as complete as, say, Sanctuary in ***Thieves' World***, are masterpieces of deduction, considering the scant information from which they were derived. Finally, the Balrog is marvelous! He is treated with the proper respect (and fear) in the ***Rolemaster*** system, at long last.

There are flaws. Much as they try, the conversion tables have trouble translating the stats from ***Rolemaster*** to other systems; like most translations, much is lost in the process. The deadly Balrog loses the most; after all, orcs and trolls don't differ too much from system to system. The other creatures and beasts in ***Moria*** scarcely deserve more than contempt; the intelligent inhabitants are danger enough, why include animals that are unbelievable or out of place or both? But these are minor flaws; the biggest problem with the module is its scope. Why present information on how the dwarves work rock? Why talk about brick patterns and the inner workings of the smithies? In a *module? **Moria*** suffers from too much and too little information: Far too much for a module, and not enough for a good campaign.

If you don't mind the price tag, ***Moria*** is a wonderful expansion on the information in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. I suggest it as a sourcebook for dwarves more than as a place of adventure; the inhabitants are too tough and the place is too big (super-sadistic GMs and doom-seeking players might like it, though . . .). With the proposed modules ***Moria II*** and ***III***, ***Moria*** might actually turn into a good campaign. We shall see.

—Craig Sheeley

THE ROMULANS (FASA); $10. Designed by David F. Tepool, Guy McLimore, Jr., and Greg Poehlien. Supplement to ***Star Trek — The Role-Playing Game***. 8½" x 11" 32-page illustrated player handbook, 8½" x 11" 48-page illustrated guidebook, wraparound pocketed cover. Playing time and number of players indefinite. Published November 1984.

The Romulans is the third in a series of character generation supplements for FASA's ***Star Trek*** RPG. Following the precedent established by the second version of ***ST — RPG***, the supplement is split into two books. The ***Star Fleet Intelligence Manual*** is an illustrated information guide on Romulan history and culture. The ***Game Operations Manual*** (subtitled "The Romulan Way") repeats most of the information of the player's book, but provides planetary data on various Romulan worlds and explains how to create Romulan player characters for campaign use.

After the success of the ***Klingons*** supplement, it only seemed natural for FASA to release one for the other main nemesis of the Federation, the Romulans. In the past, FASA has taken great amounts of time and effort to get anything associated with ***ST — RPG*** perfected; hence the 18-month gap between the two modules. FASA streamlined the basic game during this time, and the Romulan supplement was patterned along these new lines as well. For the most part, these improvements are extremely beneficial. Unlike ***The Klingons***, the Romulan supplement contains valuable data on various key planets in the Empire and a historical timeline detailing the Empire's rise and development (something that ***The Klingons*** desperately needed). In addition, the character generation procedure allows a player to create a Romulan character in about ⅔ of the time it takes to create one of another race.

The supplement, however, is not without flaws; in fact, some of them are almost fatal. When designing ***The Klingons*** FASA had John M. Ford's novel *The Final Reflection* to use as background material. In the case of ***The Romulans***, there was no definitive novel to use as a guide. Out of the three or four novels centered on the Romulans, all of them contradicted each other on various matters. Tepool and his group were forced to "weed out" the good qualities of each of the novels and attempt to weave them together into a believable tapestry. The remaining gaps were filled with material of their own creation.

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Obviously, these were large gaps, because the supplement reads as if it was badly spliced together in some sections. While it gives an explanation for the main motivation behind Romulan aggression, it binds them to a very inflexible (read: boring) way of life, centered on being creatures of duty and nothing more. A few details on the lighter side of Romulan culture would have helped players actually "think like a Romulan."

To sum things up, although ***The Romulans*** is a helpful addition to ***ST — RPG***, it pales when placed alongside its Klingon counterpart. Had FASA spent more time on developing background material, this would have been a better supplement. Still, it's a fair source of background material for the GM who wants to run a Federation campaign in Romulan territory. But using it for a Romulans campaign? If I were you, I'd stick to running the Klingons until FASA does some more refining on the material, or someone writes a definitive Romulan novel.

—Bob Mosley III

MARGIN OF PROFIT (FASA); $6. Designed by J. Andrew Keith. Adventure for ***Star Trek — The Role-Playing Game***. 8½" x 11" 48-page illustrated module. For two to nine players; playing time two to four hours, or till somebody gets rich. Published November 1984.

Margin of Profit is an adventure module for FASA's ***Star Trek*** RPG. The module is designed to be used in conjunction with FASA's second character generation supplement, ***Trader Captains and Merchant Princes***, as it involves settings surrounding mercantile activities. The main plot of the adventure concerns industrial intrigue and backstabbing on the planet Coridan (from the episode "Journey to Babel"). A group of free traders hired to make dilithium runs winds up in the middle of an interstellar priating operation run by the Tellarites. In order to prevent the loss of their corporate stock (which is how the group was paid), they must put a stop to the pirates and their disruptive actions.

Harcourt Fenton Mudd would have loved this module. In fact, he probably should have been featured in it. ***Margin of Profit*** is an extensively-playtested and extremely well-paced adventure. The plot itself has a "Han Solo" flair to it, as the players are understandably skittish about tangling with pirates. Their run-ins with the story's "Harry Mudd clone," Alemir Akalzed, can either make the group even more uncertain of the situation or actually become their salvation at the end. There are nine pre-rolled characters and fifteen NPCs, each with its own psychological profile. Deck plans for a Mission-class courier are also included, as well as data on the various quirks involved in running the ship. For example, any time a ship systems skill roll is required, a luck roll must be made as well, accompanied by a profane word or two while hitting a particular spot on the control panel.

The only true flaw with the module is that in order to use it to the fullest, the GM must have access to the ***Trader Captains*** supplement. This is because the module was designed with the beginnings of a merchant campaign in mind. While it serves as a good springboard for such a campaign, it doesn't bode well for those players who have established characters on a Federation cruiser. Andrew Keith takes account of this by proposing a "Mission: Impossible" adventure featuring part of the established crew, which is a good idea unless none of the players have ever been in a merchant campaign of any sort. In such a case, perhaps NPC data for Harry Mudd should have been added as an option for the players to use. His knowledge of trading and his general ineptitude would have proved extremely valuable (and amusing) in such a scenario.

Despite this one flaw, ***Margin of Profit*** is an exceptional module. The main plot is clear and defined, and the subplots and distractions for the players are detailed as well. Using the material supplied in this module, an extensive merchant campaign can be started with this mission on Coridan. As a suggestion to those who try the secret mission scenario, throw Harry Mudd into the frying pan with the rest of the players, even if it's just for a few laughs.

—Bob Mosley III

DEMAND OF HONOR (FASA); $6. Designed by J. Andrew Keith. Adventure for ***Star Trek — The Role-Playing Game***. 8½" x 11" 48-page illustrated booklet. For two to five players; playing time one to four hours, or until one race is crushed.

Demand of Honor is an adventure module for FASA's ***Star Trek*** RPG. Set during the first five-year mission of the U.S.S. Enterprise, the main plot of the module concerns a band of outcast Gorn pirates and Star Fleet's efforts to prevent their attacks on Federation shipping along the border. The crew of the destroyer *Hastings* is assigned to find a solution to the problem before it disrupts peace negotiations between the Federation and the Gorn Alliance. However, the oddities of the Gorn honor codes make solving the problem difficult. Before the *Hastings* can take any action, a high-ranking Gorn must deliver a message of submission to the renegades. This Gorn is none other than the Gorn captain from the *Trek* episode "Arena."

This module has obviously been extensively playtested and refined. Throughout the module, the GM can easily maintain a sense of urgency. There are several options the players can take in each major section of the module, and Keith's suggestions

Point/Counterpoint

THE IRON WIND, second edition (Iron Crown Enterprises); $8. Designed by Peter C. Fenlon and Terry K. Amthor. Module for ***Rolemaster***. 8½" x 11" 50-page book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

The Iron Wind is a campaign setting in the "Loremaster" series. This is I.C.E.'s second edition of the work, and they have managed to retain the best points of the original, correct its problems, and expand it as well. The book gives an introduction to, and brief history of, the world of "Loremaster" and its major continent of Jaiman. The main subject of the book, however, is the "Mur Fostisyr," a group of large islands to the northwest of Jaiman, within the "arctic circle" of its world. Four different races are covered in detail, including the lands each holds, their cultures, histories, cities, strongholds, and relations with each other. The book takes its title from the force of Unlife known as the "Iron Wind," whose servants pervade the area. Also dwelling here is Aztaur the Demonlord. Plans are given for his castle, as well as those of the "Iron Wind" and the peoples mentioned above. Descriptions and charts are given for the geography, flora and fauna, combat abilities of the residents and their notable personages, poisons, healing herbs, etc., and notes on Syrkakar and Ky'taari vocabulary.

All in all, this is a very satisfying product. It is professional in appearance, well organized, and makes entertaining reading (the bulk of the text is written as narration by a Loremaster named Elor Once Dark). The artwork ranges from acceptable to excellent, with the maps falling at the high end of that scale. Every effort has been made to make things easy on the referee; charts are easy to find, summaries of each culture are provided in a shaded box at the end of each description, keys to maps and building layouts are generally very clear, suggestions for scenarios and player character histories are given, and guidelines for converting to other fantasy roleplaying systems are available from I.C.E. for the cost of an SASE.

Problems are relatively minor. There are a few scattered typos, and although the glossary helps quite a bit, native terms are still confusing at times (and some aren't listed). Also, the city map legend uses nearly the same color for cobbler shops and brothels, which can be perplexing, to say the least.

All things considered, I heartily recommend ***The Iron Wind*** as a fascinating setting for campaigning or as source material. Read it and you'll feel you've been there. It's a bargain at $8.

—Lester W. Smith

Iron Crown's ***The Iron Wind*** is a fantasy supplement detailing the world of Mur Fostisyr, a cluster of islands dominated by the powerful and mysterious Loremasters (sort of a secret supernatural cult). Magic exists naturally, thanks to the presence of the "Essence," an unseen aura projected by most living things. Evil is represented by "Unlife," a force that thrives on death, destruction, and other nasty business. The "Iron Wind" of the title is a vaguely defined carrier of Unlife — whatever it is, you can bet you don't want it blowing through your neighborhood.

I'll give one thing to ***The Iron Wind*** right off the bat — it contains about as much information (statistics, background, and maps) as is humanly possible to cram into fifty pages. There's a staggering amount of detail; page after page of legends and history, floor plans, creature lists — you name it. Much of the material is presented as first-person reminiscences of the well-travelled (and long-winded) Elor Once Dark. It's a nice change of pace, even though after twenty pages or so, Elor's flowery narrative ("Chill he is of lungs and mind, and his minions know no mercy . . .") gets a little tedious. The background information pertaining to the various races is as complete as I've ever seen in a fantasy module. And I also appreciated I.C.E.'s generous offer of providing detailed conversion notes for any FRP system for the price of a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Still, I can't help wondering what we're supposed to do with all this. When there's less space devoted to scenario suggestions than there is to the linguistics of the Syrkakar language, you know you're in for an uphill climb. I don't know about you, but I've got enough background and supplementary material to last me for a couple of lifetimes, and it's getting harder for me to work up the enthusiasm to sift through it all to come up with a playable adventure — isn't that the writer's job? And what do you make of scenario suggestions like ". . . if they (the adventurers) are on land, they might run into any number of other creatures which inhabit the Mur Fostisyr." Is that supposed to be helpful? I'd gladly trade ten pages of description for one page of usable plot.

In spite of I.C.E.'s claim that ***The Iron Wind*** is a campaign module, it's not — at least not by my definition. This is just another background encyclopedia, and not a particularly original one at that. I admire the effort, but I can't shake the feeling that I've seen it all before. Take a good look at it before you part with your eight bucks.

—Rick Swan

have accounted for a high majority of them. Pre-generated characters, such as the main officers of the *Hastings*, have attribute listings and personality profiles. The description of the Gorn captain fits with the impressions one gets from his brief appearance in "Arena." This time, he's given a name and a bit of background explaining his motivations. Crisply-illustrated ship data and ship systems charts are also included for the Gorn vessels, as well as a brief history of the Gorn race and its conflict with the Federation. The latter is important for anyone running Gorns as NPCs, as it explains much of the motivation behind the Gorn's actions in "Arena."

Demand of Honor has few flaws, most of which center on the identity of the Gorn ambassador. Although this module was designed for use with its pre-generated crew, a campaign using the *Enterprise* crew would appear to be ideal. The Gorn captain's statistics lists that he now has a great admiration for Captain Kirk, so it would be entertaining to see how someone roleplaying Kirk would utilize this fact. Also, though the module is structured well, the GM may have to strain to keep the players heading toward the intended outcome. Seasoned GMs shouldn't have too much difficulty running this module, but beginners should avoid it until they've run a few campaigns.

Depending on what kind of players the GM is working with, this could either be a single afternoon adventure or the beginning of a galactic war campaign. On the same note, it's up to the GM to do whatever possible to guide the players to a solution that won't produce a war — that is, unless the GM wants a war with the Gorns. If this is the case, then this is the perfect module to start it off. Probably the next *ST — RPG* supplement should be on Gorn character creation. If it's half as good as the brief history in ***Demand of Honor***, then heck, I'll buy it.

—Bob Mosley III

MONSTERS OF MYTH AND LEGEND (Mayfair); $10. Designed by Greg Gorden and Neil Randall. 96-page fantasy roleplaying sourcebook. Published 1984.

Monsters of Myth and Legend is yet another "sourcebook" play aid containing encyclopedic listings of dozens of creatures and deities to beef up an existing fantasy campaign or to help would-be designers in coming up with their own adventures. Norse and Greek mythologies are covered, along with the less familiar legends of Ireland, China, the Australian Aborigines, and the American Indians. Each entry includes physical descriptions, backgrounds, game statistics, and hints on play. A thorough index, four pages of GM tables, and a bibliography of sources round out the book.

Regardless of whether you actually ever use this material in a roleplaying campaign, much of it makes for fascinating reading, particularly if you're as unfamiliar as I was with the mythologies of the Aborigines or the Irish. For instance, you ever heard of the Kurreah, an intelligent Australian crocodile that burrows underground? Or how about the Chinese Kui, a lightning-spitting shark with the head of an ox? There are plenty more that are equally bizarre, and even a casual browse through the book should give a GM plenty of new ideas. All necessary statistics are given, and even though they're biased towards ***Dungeons & Dragons***, they're easy to adapt to other systems. (I may spring the Kui on my ***Call of Cthulhu*** investigators the next time they go nosing around China.)

With all of the care that went into this book, I'm surprised at the generally haphazard quality of the illustrations. Aside from the striking cover painting, most of the artwork is hit or miss, ranging from adequate to downright embarrassing — some of it looks like a junior-high artist's idea of "scary." The high quality of the text makes the amateurish visuals even more annoying, especially considering that a good illustration is a lot more effective than a column of written description in a sourcebook of this kind.

Although roleplaying sourcebooks are invaluable for game designers, I'm not completely sold on their usefulness for your average player (or even your average GM). But if you go for this kind of thing, you'll have to look long and hard to find a more interesting one than ***Monsters of Myth and Legend***. It's a good package, fun to read, and guaranteed to have a lot of information you've never seen anywhere else.

—Rick Swan

GHOST OF LION CASTLE (TSR); $6.95. Designed by Merle M. Rasmussen. Solo adventure for ***Dungeons & Dragons***. 8½" x 11" 32-page booklet, 24¼" x 11" map/chart cardstock cover. Playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

If you want to while away a few solitary hours gaining ***Basic D&D*** experience, you might dare to be heir to the great wizard Sargon whose ghost haunts Lion Castle. You may use one of six provided magic-users or elves, or bring in your own character, limited to the modified spells listed and to third level experience. You get maps of the main walls and hallways of Lion Castle, printed on three of the cover's six panels. With twelve days' rations when you reach the outer wall, you still must be crafty and lucky to fight your way through wandering monsters and deadly traps to gain Sargon's blessing — or enough treasure to make the trip worthwhile.

The "R" rules entries are a "programmed introduction" to the programmed game entries. The "magic journal" of notes down the page edges enables you to leave message for future characters, as well as note changes in the contents of a room when you loot it or die there — all to lend greater

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realism in replays. While valuable room contents are often for *either* a magic-user *or* a fighter (not both), fortunate probing and good rolls with wandering monsters can net some valuable treasures and experience for a developing ***D&D*** character.

Unless you read maps and directions, you may lose your way in the castle entries, confused by four similar tower staircases and entries with as many as twelve alternative action choices. Well-rendered but sparse interior illustrations do little to clarify entry descriptions. And while it is possible to fight your way through Lion Castle on your own, magical combat is set up to be virtually unplayable without the ***Basic D&D*** rules.

Not as complex and involved as the invisible-ink solo modules, ***Ghost of Lion Castle*** offers little for anyone but the ***Basic D&D*** gamer trying to gain experience for a low-level character. The "magic journal" does enhance replayability, and there is adequate material for a gamemaster to use the module to create a new adventure. But those who are looking for a challenging solo would do well to look elsewhere.

—C. Mara Mallory

PLAY AIDS

MARVEL SUPER HEROES ADVENTURE FOLD-UP FIGURES (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Jeff Butler and Bruce Nesmith. Accessory (MHAC-3) for *Marvel Super Heroes*. Published 1984.

Steve Jackson Games has its ***Cardboard Heroes*** miniatures; TSR has Adventure Fold-Up Figures. They serve the same purpose — allowing the gamer to use miniatures in his or her roleplaying games without the great expense of a lot of lead figures. And they don't need painting, a plus for less adroit people like me. Each figure has three images of the character in question; a third panel identifying the subject is taped or glued behind one of the pictures to form a triangular prism of the figure.

If you play a Marvel comics campaign (in any system) this set is worth buying; the X-Men, Avengers, Fantastic Four, Alpha Flight, and New Defenders are all here, along with a handful of other major heroes like Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, Daredevil, and Moon Knight; some supporting characters like Aunt May, Franklin Richards, and Bernie Rosenthal (Captain America's girlfriend); and a smattering of villains, presumably those from the various modules TSR has published or intends to publish soon.

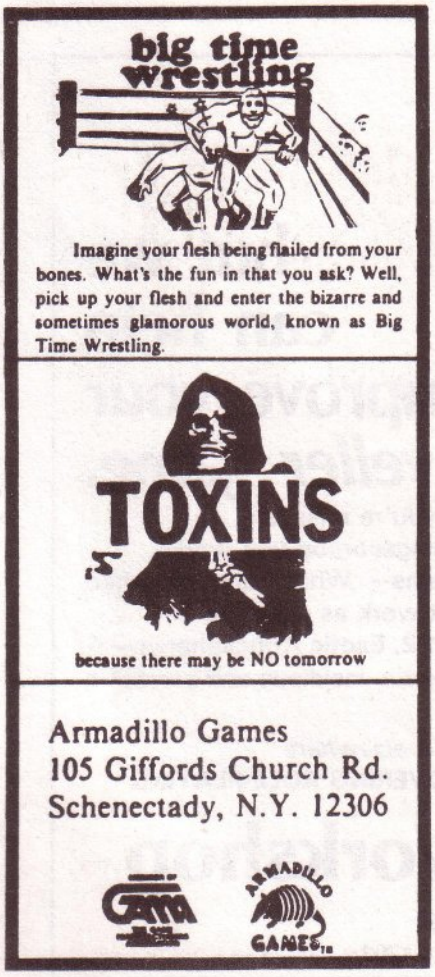
It's rather hard to establish the point in Marvel history that these characters are taken from, because certain characters are shown in their pre-*Secret Wars* costumes (for example, Dr. Doom, the X-Men, and Spider-Man) and others aren't (especially She-Hulk). The scale is horrendous — Kitty Pryde's dragon Lockheed is as big as Puck; Sasquatch and the Hulk are the size of Sentinels. The Badoon, the Sentinels, the Skrulls, A.I.M.*, and S.H.I.E.L.D.* are each represented by quartets of identically-posed agents; S.H.I.E.L.D. alone can even show differing hair color.

In conclusion, I'm afraid that it comes down to price; do you want to pay six dollars for a lot of cardboard figures, including a number of questionable values (Galactus, for example; I occasionally joke about having the big G devour my campaign, but how often will he really come into play?). All in all, a mixed value for most of us.

—Russell Grant Collins

*A.I.M. = Advanced Idea Mechanics; S.H.I.E.L.D. = Supreme Headquarters International Espionage, Law-enforcement Division, as if we had to tell you (I always wanted to use this footnote).

—Rapping Russell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PUBLICATIONS

THE FIRST AND SECOND CITADEL COMPENDIA — An Irregular Journal (Citadel Miniatures); $3 per issue. Edited by Rick Priestly, Bryan Ansell, Tony Ackland, *et al.* Published 1983 and 1984.

The two volumes of the *Citadel Compendium* are annual journals that cover Games Workshop products such as ***Warhammer***, as well as illustrating the latest Citadel 25mm miniatures. The *First Compendium* contains rules expansions and errata for ***WH***, as well as a short scenario. New material is included from the upcoming ***Warhammer*** supplement "The Mark of Chaos" to allow players to generate Chaotic characters. A very basic guide to painting 25mm figures and illustrations of the newest Citadel miniatures rounds out the premiere issue. Volume two also has a ***WH*** scenario, along with some examples of play using the ***WH*** miniatures rules. A more detailed section on figure painting and assembly of multi-part miniatures is included as well. The miniatures section of volume two is especially large, since Citadel now distributes the fine line of Chronicle miniatures.

The two volumes of the *Compendium* are highly useful to anyone using the ***Warhammer*** system, as they contain both rules interpretations and new material. The catalog section should interest any serious collector of 25mm figures, even though the miniatures are illustrated with drawings rather than photographs. While the journals are basically "house organs" for Games Workshop, there is a definite place for such publications in gaming. In fact, some of the most successful gaming publications are house organs (e.g., Avalon Hill's *The General*).

The only flaw with the *Citadel Compendia* is that if you don't use ***WH***, there probably isn't a lot here to hold your interest, unless you are a loyal customer of Citadel Miniatures.

With most catalogs of 25mm figures costing $2-$3, the Compendia are worth their value to serious collectors of fantasy miniatures just for the extensive illustrations of figures alone. If you use ***WH*** or like Citadel Miniatures, the *Compendium* is highly recommended; otherwise save your money for a more universal publication.

—Edwin J. Rotondaro

MINIATURES

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (Dark Horse Studios); $3.75. Sculpted by Ian Lungold. Four 20mm figures. Based on the Mirage Studio comic book characters. Released 1985.

The concept of teenage mutant ninja turtles is, to say the least, funny/bizarre. But Ian Lungold, an artist whose sense of whimsy has led him to such acts as putting lederhosen on a treant, has shown admirable restraint. He has sculpted a formidable set of ninja. They may be turtles, but they're the *meanest*, most *vicious* turtles that I've ever seen. Like their comic-book counterparts, there's nothing comical about them.

That there is no gaming system that uses ninja turtles is no real handicap. If gaming systems can use duckmen and giant talking beavers, why not turtles? If your GM can't find a place for them in his or her campaign, get a new GM.

But first, get a set of teenage mutant ninja turtles.

—Bob Kindel

CELESTIAL DRAGON (Ral Partha Enterprises); $6. Sculpted by Tom Meier. 25mm fantasy miniature, rub-on finish and applicator in blister pack. Assembly required.

This miniature is one of Ral Partha's new series of *Dragonscale* tie-ins. These figures come with a container of metallic wax finish and a sponge applicator. The finish is designed to be applied over a primed (or primed and painted) figure, adding a metallic sheen to scales or armor. The Celestial Dragon comes in three pieces: the head and tail must be glued to the body.

This is an absolutely topnotch figure and a fine example of state-of-the-art sculpting and casting. The dragon is very Oriental in appearance, and could (with the proper coloration) serve as any of several types of dragon. The figure is animated in the pose commonly depicted for Oriental dragons: the snakelike body arches into multiple loops. The detail is stunning for a figure this size (4" from snout to tail; 1¼" tall). The head alone features horns, mane, bushy eyebrows, and beard, as well as "feelers" on either side of the snout. Flash and sprue are minimal.

Complaints about this dragon are relatively minor. The head and tail come joined together rather awkwardly, requiring careful work with a modeling knife to separate them without marring detail. Gluing both head and tail to the body will require a bit of fill-in work to conceal the gaps. The rub-on metallic finish becomes *rub-off* finish unless you purchase the "fixer" spray (sold separately by Ral Partha) which makes it permanent. Not only is it a bit annoying to be forced to purchase the fixer sep-

arately, but comparable results can be had in most cases by painting the figure with water-based metallic finish paints already on the market.

Overall, this figure is an excellent value for six dollars, with or without the gimmicky rub-on finish. I attribute this to the incredible detail and high quality which has become a Ral Partha trademark. This is the type of miniature which could easily become the centerpiece of a collection.

—Dan Perez

GNOLLS (Ral Partha Enterprises); $4.50. Sculpted by Julie Guthrie. 25mm fantasy miniatures. Four figures in blister pack.

These figures are among the latest offerings from Ral Partha's acclaimed *All Things Dark and Dangerous* collection. The package features four gnolls in a variety of poses. All are armored in plate mail; each bears a different weapon (polearm, ball-and-chain, battle axe, and two-handed sword).

Each gnoll in this set is superb. The variety of poses and weapons makes this set superior to those featuring four or five totally identical figures. The excellent detailing ranges from a fleur-de-lis pattern engraved on the battle axe to the thigh daggers worn by two gnolls. In fact, this band of canine warriors is laden with weapons to such a degree that the package could have been titled "Gnoll War Party" instead of "Gnolls."

The only problem with this set of figures (and it's a trivial gripe) is the fair amount of flash evident on a couple of the figures. This can be remedied by a few minutes of trimming and filing, though.

I can heartily recommend this set of miniatures. It is more than worth the price, if just for the versatility afforded by the variety of poses and weapons.

—Dan Perez

FOLKLORE CREATURES OF THE NIGHT (Grenadier Models); $7. 25mm fantasy miniatures. Boxed set of 10 figures.

This is a boxed set from Grenadier's *Dragon Lords* collection, and features monsters from popular folklore and legend. They include Frankenstein's monster, a werewolf, a male and a female vampire, a witch, a zombie, a ghoul, a ghost, a mummy, and a hunchbacked graverobber.

While nearly all of these creatures have been offered in different incarnations by a number of companies, it's nice to see a boxed set of archetypal fiends. Some of these figures are standouts. The skeletal, vaporous ghost is most reminiscent of the phantoms depicted in the ending of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The ghoul is positively Lovecraftian, and the male vampire is modeled after the bald, pointy-eared bloodsucker in *Nosferatu*. In addition, the mummy and zombie both have recognizable facial features: they both look like they *were* somebody before becoming what they are. The witch is not portrayed as a crone, but rather as a nubile young female clutching her broom. The detailing on the figures in this set is, with few exceptions, good. Finally, the figures are almost totally free from flash and sprue.

Unfortunately, some of these figures are *not* standouts, in that they have been replicated better elsewhere. Notable examples of this include Frankenstein's monster, the hunchback, and the werewolf. I suspect this is largely a matter of taste, however. Since the figures are pictured in photographs on the back of the box, it is an easy matter to decide for yourself. My only other complaint is that detailing on a few of the figures (particularly the female vampire) is skimpy.

All things considered, this is one of the best boxed sets in the *Dragon Lords* line, and is well worth adding to your collection. Despite the fact that some of these figures have been done better, they are, by and large, imaginative variations on their respective themes.

—Dan Perez

DRAGON LORDS FIGURES: *NINJA & SAMURAI ADVENTURERS* (Grenadier); $7. Sculpted by Andrew Chernak. 25mm figures for RPGs. Ten miniatures in box with foam insert.

Eastern characters, especially ninja, seem to fascinate many gamers. So this set should gain ready acceptance and an honored place in the miniatures collection of these gamers.

The pieces are easily among the best that Mr. Chernak has crafted to date. From the traditional split-toed boots and exotic weapons of the ninja, to the classic poses and the ornate armor of the samurai, the collection is uniformly well-designed and executed. Six of the ten pieces are cast in multiple pieces. Rather than follow the usual practice of molding the figure with open hands and providing a separate weapon to glue in, the pieces were designed with the hands attached to the weapon. When the hands are glued in place, the sleeves hide the seam. The result is a figure with a neater, stronger joint and a more natural look.

Unfortunately, forming this joint is more difficult than normal. It took me between five and fifteen minutes to join each weapon — and I have been adapting and modifying miniatures for several years. It would be safe to assume that someone with less practice would have a harder time joining the figures. Since the appeal of the ninja class in particular is highest among the younger gamers — the very ones least likely to have modelling expertise — this could create a problem. *Caveat emptor.*

In general, however, the set is an excellent one that should gain favor among gamers and dioramists alike.

—Bob Kindel

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SCANNER

News from the World of Gaming

Avalon Hill Wants Game Review Approval

The Avalon Hill Game Company has required hobby publications which receive review copies of its new releases to submit their reviews to Avalon Hill for approval.

Citing "erroneous copy and misinformation" that have appeared in past reviews of AH games, Tom Shaw of Avalon Hill said in a telephone interview that the company "wants to look at [reviews,] and if there is something we think is wrong with the review, we want to have a printed rebuttal to that effect that would accompany the article." The policy also requires magazines to grant Avalon Hill ten days to submit its response. Publications that do not agree to the policy will not receive review copies.

To date two magazines, *The Wargamer* and *Fire & Movement*, have received notification letters from Avalon Hill announcing the new policy. Wallace Poulter, editor of *Fire & Movement*, issued the following statement to *Space Gamer*: "*Fire & Movement* informed Avalon Hill that we would not submit to these demands. We feel they come dangerously close to censoring the right to free speech. However, as a matter of policy, *F&M* sends copies of all major reviews to manufacturers for designers' comments and errata [to be published in the same issue]. The designer (*not* the manufacturer) will be able, if he so wishes, to address comments made in the review. *F&M* will continue to review Avalon Hill and Victory games whether we receive review copies or not."

Wargamer editor Keith Poulter (father of Wallace) noted that *The Wargamer* also makes it a policy to solicit comments from a game's designer, but not its publisher, when the magazine runs an unfavorable major review. "We have at no time received from Avalon Hill any hint of complaint as regards erroneous copy, misinformation, or bias in our reviews or other articles," said Keith Poulter in a prepared statement. "The letter received by *The Wargamer* makes no such reference; it simply asks, without explanation, for the guaranteed right of reply in the issue in which reviews appear . . . Avalon Hill's letter may or may not be a threat to free speech. It *is*, at the very least, arrogant and insensitive. It is also, unfortunately, in keeping with the bureaucratic bullshit which we have come to expect from Avalon Hill. If necessary, *The Wargamer* will purchase its review copies on the open market, rather than submit to any form of publisher censorship," Poulter said.

TSR Not Sold After All

Shortly after the last issue of *Space Gamer* went to press, the outside investment group that had filed a letter of intent to "acquire a major interest" in TSR, Inc. withdrew. TSR has not been sold. It is "restructuring itself financially" using current finances, and "any negotiations with outside investment groups are void," according to Dieter Sturm of TSR's public relations department.

As reported last issue, top executives Brian and Kevin Blume have left the company; however, the new Chief Executive Officer is not Richard Koenigs, as reported, but E. Gary Gygax, co-designer of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** and Chairman of the Board of TSR. Gygax previously held the same position from 1975 to 1982. Sturm said there is a "very good outlook, enthused response" to Gygax's return among TSR's 95 employees, and Gygax has "an excellent attitude about regaining his position" despite duties that call for "an 80-hour week." He has completed the first of two new ***AD&D*** hardcovers, ***Unearthed Arcana***, for June release. The second, ***Oriental Adventures***, is scheduled for this fall.

"TSR is still operational, and no 'fate' is in sight," said Sturm.

As a postscript, Sturm noted that the television newsmagazine *60 Minutes* has delayed broadcasting its story on ***Dungeons & Dragons*** until this fall.

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Stardate Sold to *Game News*

Stardate magazine has been sold by FASA Corporation to Associates International Incorporated, publisher of *Game News*. The magazine will continue to support FASA game products (***Star Trek, Dr. Who, Battledroids***), but will expand to include science fiction and fantasy stories.

Dale Kemper, *Stardate*'s current editor, will continue to assemble the gaming section of the new magazine under FASA's supervision; the new editor is sf author Dave Bischoff (*Day of the Dragonstar*), and the Editorial Director is Ted White, former editor of *Heavy Metal* and *Amazing Stories*. Gaming material will occupy one quarter of each issue.

FASA's last issue will be #7. With #8, *Stardate* goes from quarterly to bimonthly frequency, with larger issues and upgraded paper. The circulation will increase from 7,000 to 10,000, and the price will drop to $2 a copy. There are no current subscribers, but the new publisher will be taking subscriptions.

"We're breathing sighs of relief [about] the new arrangement," said Ross Babcock, Executive Vice President of FASA. "If we continued to do [*Stardate*,] it would be very successful for a magazine in the adventure gaming industry," Babcock said — but FASA does not have the production staff to support a magazine in addition to its game schedule. The sale of *Stardate* will allow FASA to support its new ***Dr. Who*** RPG as heavily as it supports ***Star Trek — The Role-Playing Game***; six ***Dr. Who*** products are planned for 1985, which Babcock said is twice what FASA could have handled if *Stardate* were still around.

"***Star Trek*** is a very nice thing to have in a magazine," said Gerald Swick of Associates International Inc. And "by having three magazines, we're more appealing [to distributors] than if we had one or two." The Washington, DC company currently publishes *Game News* and *Humor News*.

According to Swick, *Stardate* will cover not only FASA products, but games from other publishers as well. Some stories in the magazine will include "translations" into gaming terms.

Gaming article submissions should be sent to Dale Kemper at *Stardate's* current editorial address: 3316 Woodford Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45213. Fiction submissions should be addressed to *Stardate*, 1010 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005.

Amber License to West End

Roger Zelazny, author of the popular Amber series of science fantasy novels, has recently agreed to permit West End Games to publish games based on the Amber universe.

"We are very pleased with this agreement," said West End's President, Helena Rubinstein. "Amber was one of the few really valuable literary science fiction licenses not already signed by an adventure game publisher."

Zelazny is currently under contract to Arbor House for an additional three novels in the series. The first of the three new books, *Trumps of Doom*, was published in May.

"I'm excited that the Amber material will be made available in a new medium," said Zelazny. "My children play adventure games, and they are as excited as I."

1984 Origins Award Winners

This year's Origins Awards, "aimed at recognizing outstanding achievements in Adventure Gaming," were awarded at the Origins 85 national gaming convention, held at Towson State University outside Baltimore, June 27–30, 1985. The nomination process was open; the final ballot was voted on by members of the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design.

Categories of interest to readers of *SG:*

Best Roleplaying Rules: (tie) ***Twilight: 2000*** (Game Designers' Workshop) and ***Paranoia*** (West End Games). Other nominees in the category included ***Chill*** (Pacesetter), ***RuneQuest III*** (The Avalon Hill Game Company), and ***Element Masters*** (Escape Ventures).

Best Roleplaying Adventure: ***Live and Let Die*** (Victory Games). Other nominees: ***Citadel of Zushran*** (Ragnarok), ***Citybook II*** (Blade/Flying Buffalo), the ***Dragonlance*** series (TSR), and ***Encyclopedia Harnica*** (Columbia Games).

Best Science Fiction Boardgame: ***Web and Starship*** (West End Games). Other nominees: ***Battledroids*** (FASA), ***Hammer's Slammers*** (Mayfair), ***Shockwave*** (Steve Jackson Games), and ***Star Trek III Starship Combat Game*** (FASA).

Best Fantasy Boardgame: ***The Lonely Mountain*** (Iron Crown Enterprises). Other nominees: ***Battlecars*** (Games Workshop), ***Dragonriders of Pern*** (Nova Games), ***Talisman*** (Games Workshop), and ***Worlds of Boris Vallejo*** (Mayfair).

Best Professional Roleplaying Magazine: *Dragon.* Other nominees: *Different Worlds, White Dwarf, Space Gamer,* and *Heroes.*

Best Play-By-Mail Game: ***Starweb*** (Flying Buffalo). Other nominees: ***Beyond the Stellar Empire*** (Adventures by Mail), ***Crasimoff's World*** (Adventures By Mail), ***Illuminati PBM*** (Adventure Systems), and ***Starmaster II*** (Schubel & Son).

Best Graphic Presentation in an Adventure Game: ***Vietnam*** (Victory Games). Other nominees: ***Element Masters, Paranoia, Web and Starship,*** and ***Star Trek III, Starship Combat Game.***

Frank Chadwick (***Twilight: 2000***) was named to the Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame.

Other winners included ***South Mountain*** (Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame, West End Games), ***Vietnam*** (Best 20th Century Boardgame, Victory Games), *Wargamer* (Best Professional Boardgame Magazine), *Alarums & Excursions* (Best Amateur Adventure Gaming Magazine), ***Carriers at War*** (Best Adventure Game for the Home Computer, Strategic Studies Group), ***The Sword and the Flame*** (Best Miniatures Rules, Greenfield Hobby), *The Courier* (Best Professional Miniatures Magazine), Ral Partha's *25mm Colonials* (Best Historical Figure Series), Ral Partha's *25mm Personalities* (Best Fantasy/SF Figure Series), and *Star Trek Starships* (Best Vehicular Series, FASA).

The Origin Awards comprise the H.G. Wells Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Miniatures and Roleplaying Games, and the Charles Roberts Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Boardgaming. Charles Roberts, designer of ***Tactics*** and founder of the adventure gaming hobby, was present at the awards ceremony; H.G. Wells, author of one of the first books on miniatures gaming (*Little Wars*) as well as *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds,* was unable to attend.

Press Releases

From West End Games:

"West End Games is proud to announce that James F. Dunnigan, founder and former president of SPI and designer of more than 100 games, has been signed to design a new game.

"The game, to be co-designed with Austin Bay and developed by SPI veteran Joe Balkoski, will be a simulation of hypothetical conflict in the Persian Gulf region. In a number of scenarios, it will cover both potential American/Soviet conflict, and possible conflicts between the Gulf nations and both super-powers.

"The current working title is ***War in the Gulf.***

"Dunnigan currently works as a principal of a software business. He will not be returning to games full-time. Reportedly, the game grew out of his long-term participation in the modelling and simulation of modern military affairs for the War College. In his spare time, Dunnigan writes; recent books include *How to Make War* (William Morrow) and *A Quick and Dirty Guide to War* (Morrow), the latter co-authored with Austin Bay.

"Austin Bay has been involved in computer simulation for the War College and Strategic Studies Institute. He writes on military and political affairs for a number of journals, including the *New York* Times, Armor, and others. His first novel, *The Coyote Cried Twice* (Arbor House) was published this spring."

From Midnight Games:

"Midnight Games is pleased to announce both its arrival in Sacramento, California from Anchorage, Alaska, and the upcoming release of its new play-by-mail game, ***Epic.***

"***Epic*** is a strategic level, empire-building game which allows for unique position types and optimum player interaction and competition.

"Designed by James Landes, and playtested by some of the toughest and most successful PBM gamers in the hobby, ***Epic*** is scheduled for release by August 1, and processing of set-ups will begin on August 10.

"For more information, write to Midnight Games, P.O. Box 421356, Sacramento, CA 95843."

From Digest Group Publications:

"*The Traveller's Digest*, approved for use with *Traveller*, has just announced a June 1 publishing date for its charter issue. Each 52-page issue is scheduled to contain a 26-page adventure, complete with character descriptions, subsector and world maps, library data, and encounter tables. One regular column, '***Traveller*** Tech Briefs,' has special information on new and old technology used in the feature adventure. Everything in the magazine is designed to be consistent with the ***Traveller*** universe.

"The *Digest*'s 'Grand Tour' of the Imperium starts 'behind the claw' in the Spinward Marches. You'll travel to Vland, Capitol, Terra, the Aslan Hierate, and across the Great Rift via the Jump-5 Route. Naturally, there will be plenty of stops along the way; you'll meet all the major races face-to-face, and many of the minor ones (including some you've never heard of).

"Single copies are $3.95; a one-year subscription (four issues) is $14.00. Send check or money order to Digest Group Publications, 8979 Mandan Ct., Boise, ID 83709, or visit your local ***Traveller*** dealer."

Convention Calendar

***Joplin, MO** — OZARKON I, Aug. 3–4. SF and gaming con. Steve Jackson will be Guest of Honor. Contact Ozarkon I, Box 2151, Joplin, MO 64803.

***Milwaukee, WI** — GENCON 18, Aug. 22–25. The biggest game convention in the country moves to the Mecca Convention Center in Milwaukee. Contact GenCon 18, Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

***Austin, TX** — LONE STAR CON, Aug. 30 — Sept. 2. The North American Science Fiction Convention. Contact F.A.C.T., Box 9612, Austin, TX 78766.

Los Angeles, CA — GATEWAY 1985, Aug. 31 — Sept. 2. Gaming con. Contact Diverse Talents, Inc., Dept. GW85, P.O. Box 8399, Long Beach, CA 90808.

Lexington, KY — AUTUMN CAMPAIGNS 85, Sept. 7. Gaming and miniatures gaming con. Contact the Rusty Scabbard, 513 E. Maxwell St., Lexington, KY 40502.

St. Paul, MN — U-CON 3, Oct. 4–6. Gaming con. Contact U-Con 3, 262 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103.

Denver, CO — CRUSADERCON V, Oct. 4–6. Gaming con. Contact Auraria Gamers Club, Box 13395, Denver, CO 80201-3395.

*SJ Games will attend those conventions marked with an asterisk.

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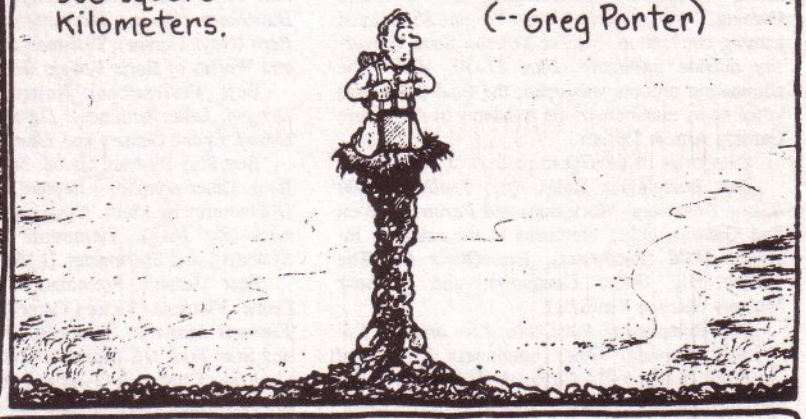
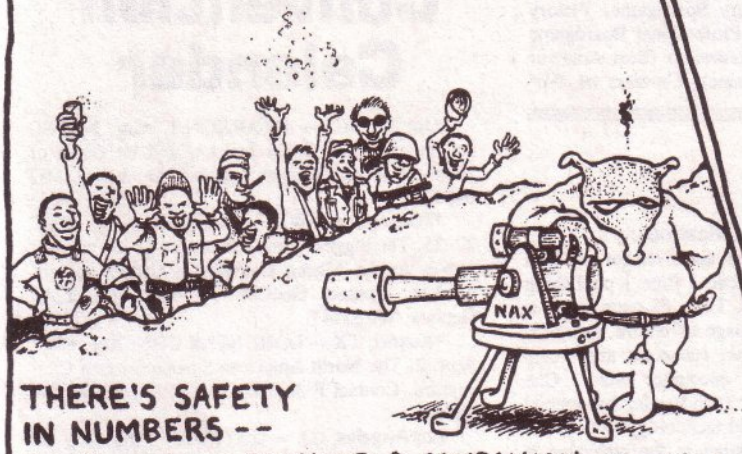
MURPHY'S RULES

ATOMIC TNT?

In AFTERMATH (FGU), a one-ton charge of high explosive will kill nearly every living thing in 300 square kilometers.

(--Greg Porter)

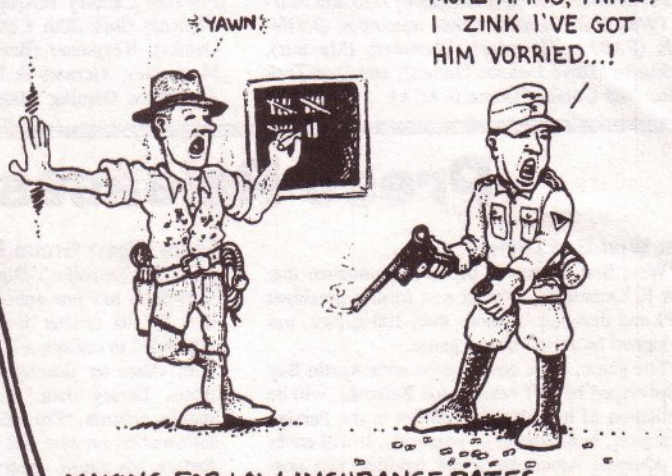




THERE'S SAFETY IN NUMBERS --

In Chaosium's RINGWORLD COMPANION, an alien weapon called the "NAX Gun" can be traverse-fired across an area, dividing its damage among all targets. Unfortunately, the rule is worded so that any group of 11 or more targets is invulnerable to harm..

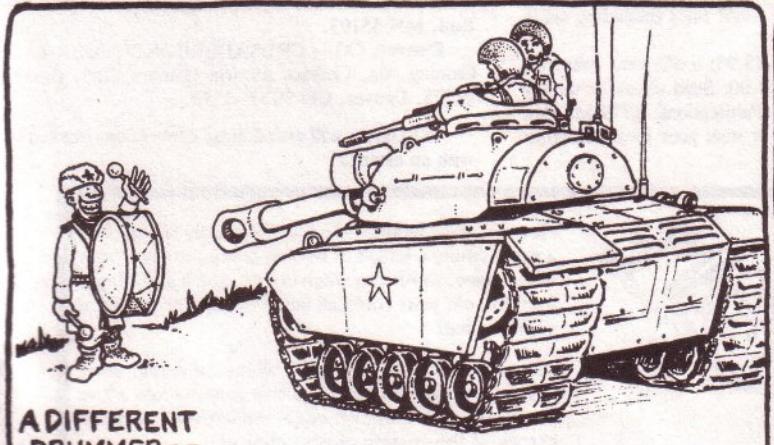
(--Pierre Savoie)



MAKING FOR LOW INSURANCE RATES --

In TSR's ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES, any character can be hit with machine gun or rifle fire up to 23 times before falling unconscious. If first aid is applied, the character can recover completely in two hours...

(--Sam Bowne)



A DIFFERENT DRUMMER --

TSR's CENTRAL COMMAND includes a rule that units must pay additional movement points to enter enemy-controlled areas "unless the unit has a red band." No unit in the game has a red band--unless, perchance, the rule refers to a Soviet Drum and Bugle Corps...

(--Forrest Johnson)

HMMM .. IT'S NOT WORKING --

In FGU's SPACE OPERA, a character who has died can be injected with "TKM", a drug that stops cell decomposition--but the drug reaches the whole body via circulation, a function that stops at the moment of death.

(--Mike DeWolfe)

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